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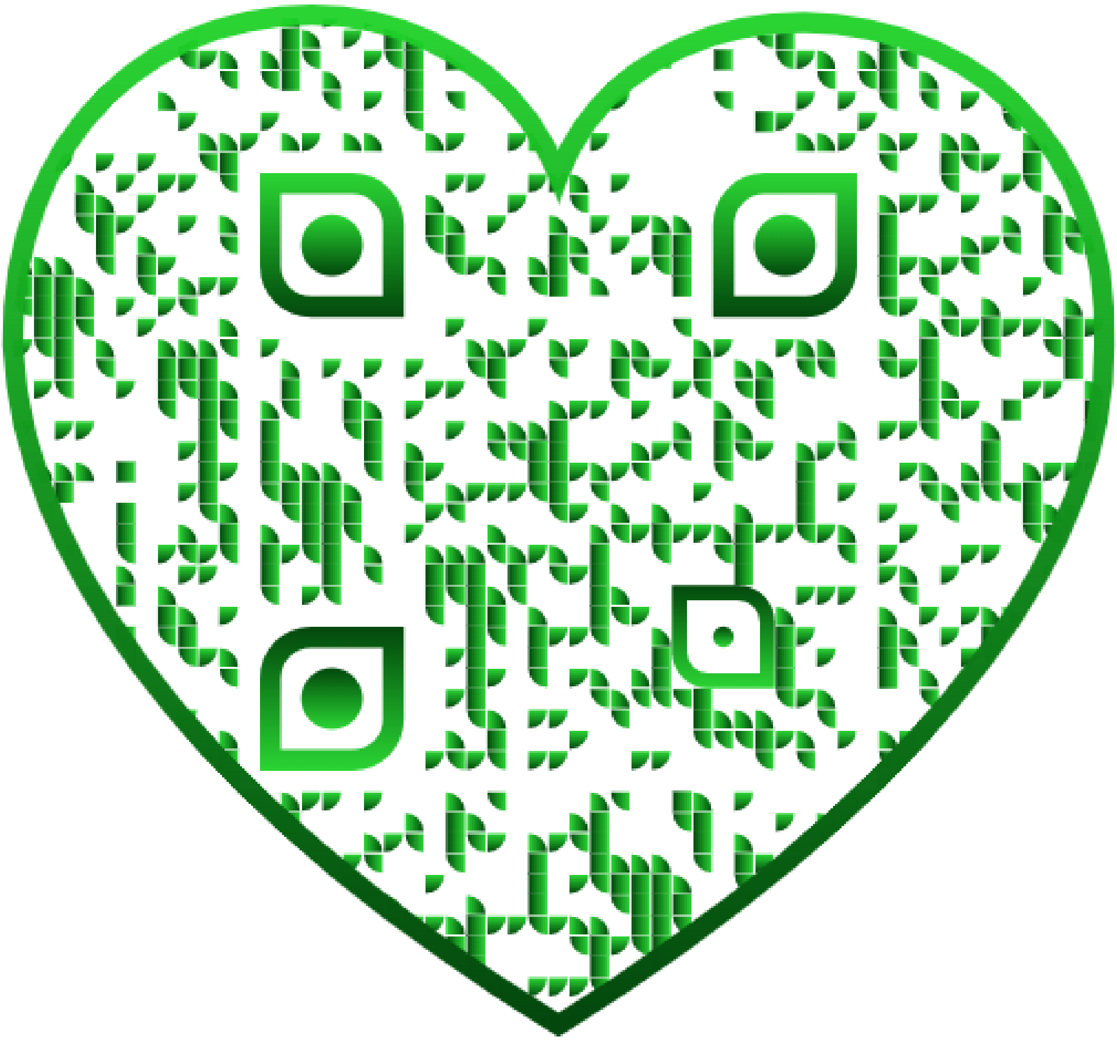

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PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

Welcome

Whatever you think of new year's resolutions, there's no denying that January can often make us sharpen our focus on what we want out of life. For me, this reflection always begins in the gap between Christmas and new year and, often, I start by thinking about what I want to achieve in the garden in the year to come. If I'm lucky, I ponder on all this while doing a bit of gardening and blowing away the Christmas fug. After I've had a think, a list gets written, and then I feel ready for the year ahead, while knowing I'll achieve some things and not others – but that's okay.

Of course, the reflection and list-making goes beyond practical gardening and, like many, I think about my health (mental and physical) and what I can do to improve it in the year to come, along with places I'd like to visit and people I'm determined to see.

Gardening is often at the heart of this wider thought and every year I vow to do more outside – not just to keep things in shape visually, but to make myself feel better too. And that's the thing, gardening really does make us feel good, which is proven by the personal accounts in our **gardening for wellness** feature (p48) and in our new ***Wellness* podcast series** (see left). Arit also reflects on how striving for the perfect garden isn't always the path to happiness (p36) – a thought-provoking read for the new year!

January's also a time for new starts, and that's the case here at *GW*. We've got a brand new series to help you enjoy delicious **homegrown food** this year (p84), along with a regular on **garden travel** (p56) to inspire you to go on adventures or create the holiday vibe at home. So happy new year. Whatever it brings, I hope your garden's a constant.

Kevin

Kevin Smith, Editor
@kevinsmithgarden

Gardeners' World
Nigella
Persian Jewels
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Coriander
Cilantro

PS... Subscribe by 6 January to get 6 issues for only £14.99, plus our 132-page *Year Planner 2025 Guide*, and 2 packs of seeds per issue from February to June. See page 28 for details.

Contents

On the cover

A great tit on an icy rowan branch

We love...

6 We love **January**
12 Expert's choice: **pines**
17 Full Monty: **Britain's unique gardens**
18 Have your say: readers' **letters**
20 Should gardeners go **veganic**?
22 Working together for **biodiversity**
24 **2 for 1 Gardens:** new destinations
26 Make a bright **new year pot display**

Be inspired

30 **Monty's** winter-scented favourites
36 Arit turns **garden sins into wins**
42 **Gardens of the Year**: meet your People's Choice award winner
48 How nature can boost **wellness**
56 **Gardens of the world:** Arizona
74 Our top 15 **easy house plants**

Do it now

60 Make an ice-cool **container display**
66 Step by step: build a **garden bench**
108 **Rejuvenate abelia** with Frances

Grow & Eat

84 January growing tips from an **urban smallholding**
91 **10 crops** to sow and plant now

Wildlife

80 Create **natural bounty** for birds

Q&A

113 Combatting **carrot fly**
114 Gardeners' Question Time

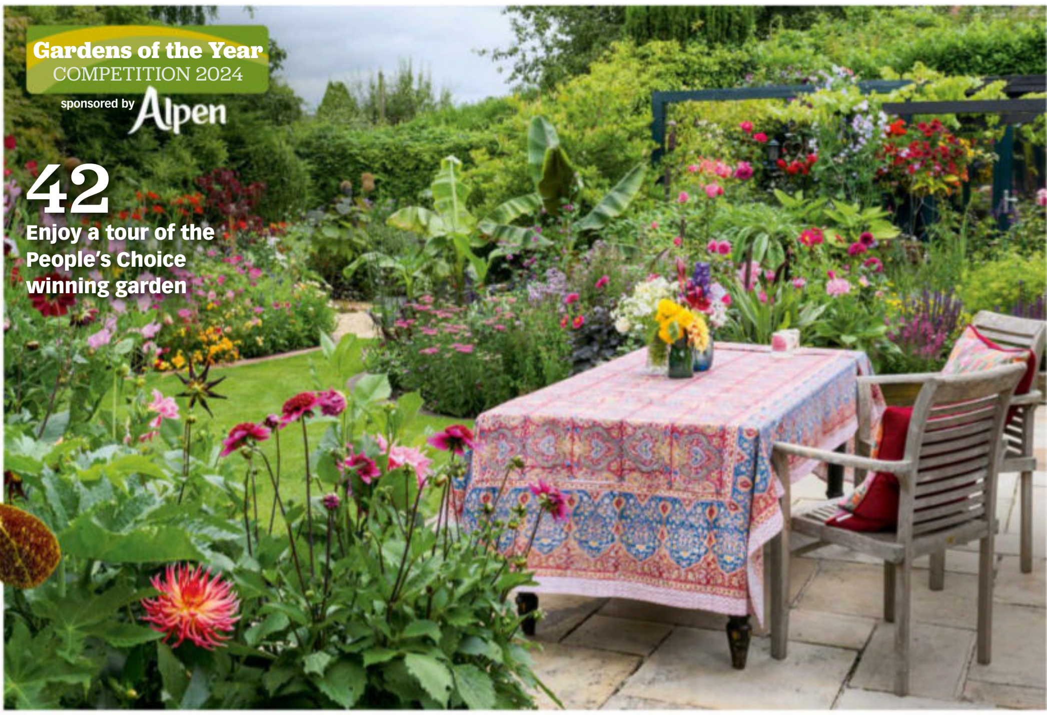
Last words

118 Crossword
129 Next month
130 Tales from Titchmarsh

56
Explore the dramatic desert gardens of Arizona

36
Arit turns bad habits into good

84
Money-saving wisdom from an urban smallholder



Gardens of the Year
COMPETITION 2024
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42
Enjoy a tour of the People's Choice winning garden

74
Discover the *GW Mag* team's favourite house plants

30 Be inspired by Monty's favourite scented plants

60 Celebrate New Year in style with Nick's pot display

48 How to garden your way to wellness

Your 11-page January planner

WHAT TO DO NOW

50 things to do this month from the Gardeners' World team

50 things to do this month

94 Around the garden
98 Flowers
100 Sow your free seeds
103 Adam's essentials
104 Greenhouse
106 Fruit & veg

Gardeners' World offers

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14 Add drama to your garden with 3 FREE gladioli varieties

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Plants

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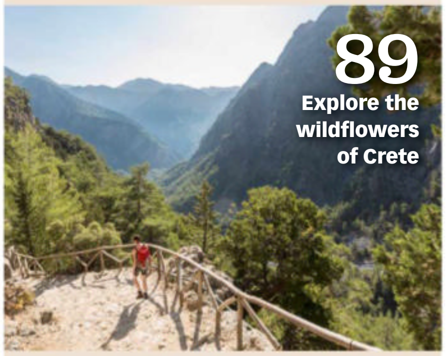

89 Explore the wildflowers of Crete

Travel

72 Book an exclusive tour of **Dorset and Somerset**'s gardens
89 Fly to **Crete** to discover its wildflowers or take a train to **Monet's garden** at Giverny
105 Stay at the historic **Castle Hotel in Windsor**
111 Enjoy a spring day out at **Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons**

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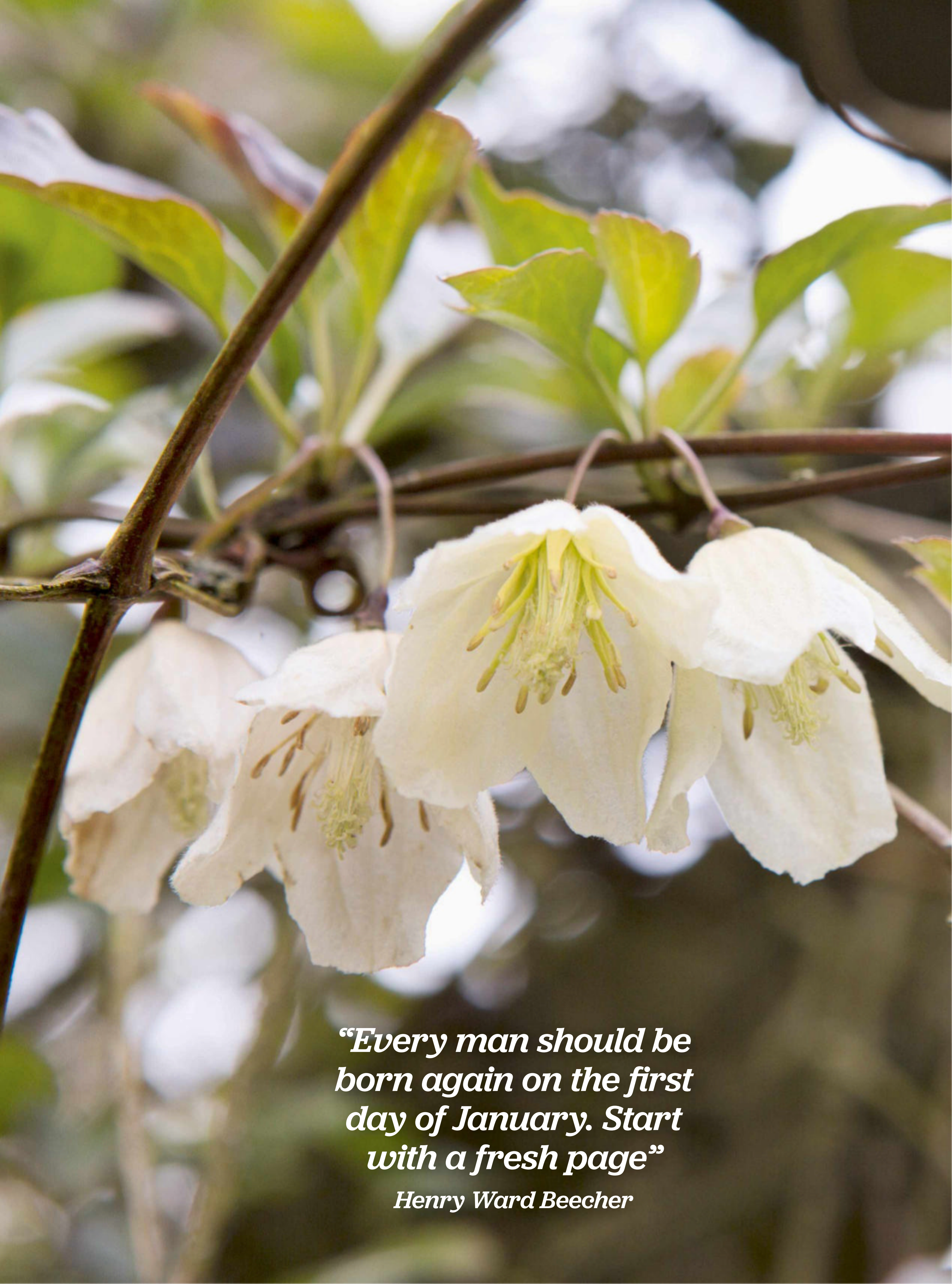


> “Every man should be
> born again on the first
> day of January. Start
> with a fresh page”
>
> *Henry Ward Beecher*

We love January

Welcome to the post-Christmas world. All the decorations have been cleared, the wrapping paper has been recycled and we are taking our first steps on the long, long road to spring. It is a time to hunker down and find comfort where we can – thick and warming soups made from knobbly root vegetables, perhaps. Gather the family onto the sofa and surround them with thick blankets. Enjoy those flaming winter sunsets (and feel the days stretch infinitesimally every day). Most importantly, go outside and look for the pointy nubbins of the emerging bulbs. There is hope in the air.

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR

STAR OF THE MONTH

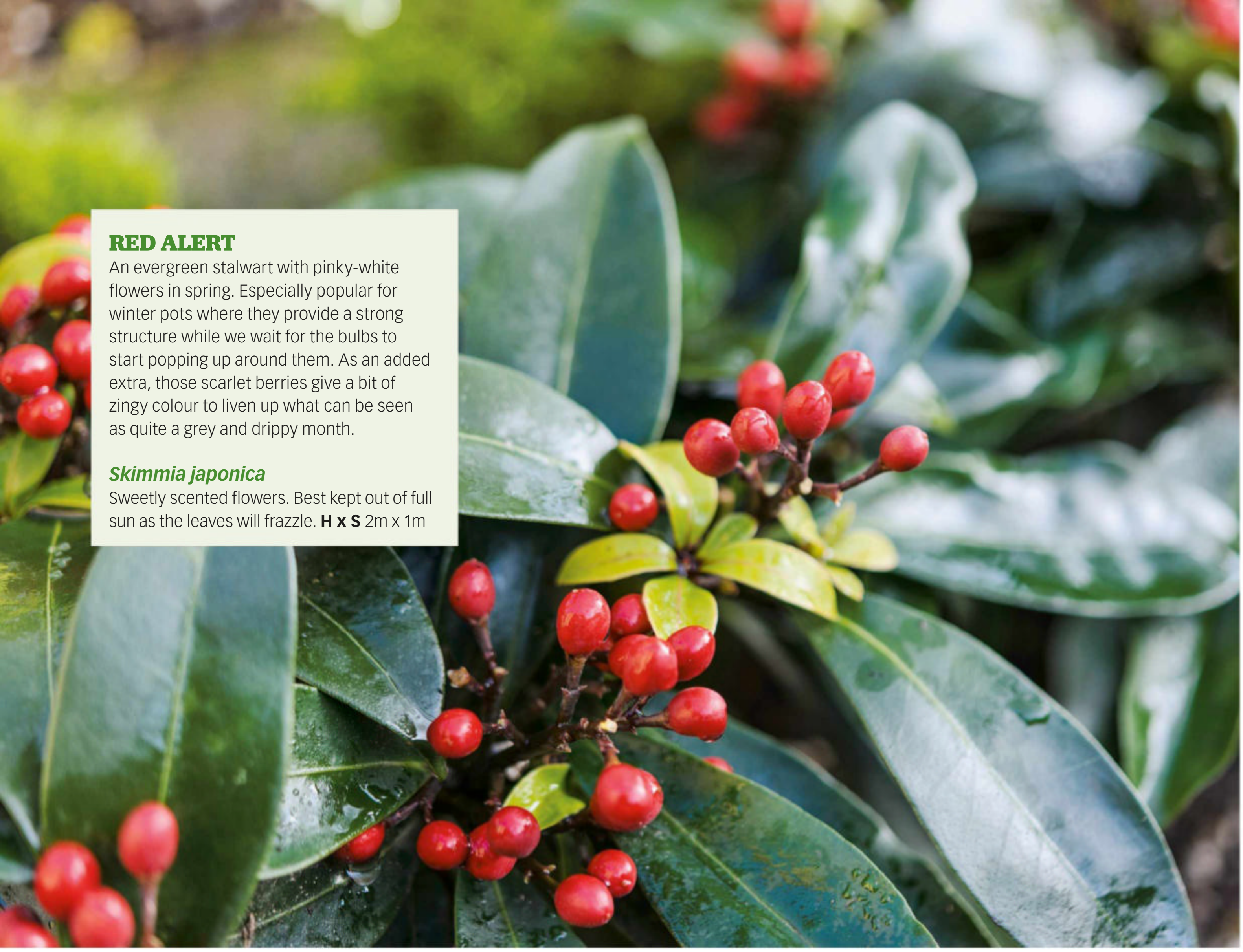
Clematis cirrhosa 'Wisley Cream'

Winter flowers are so valuable to us. I know I sound like a misery guts complaining about this month, but it does drag a bit and we definitely need something to keep our gardening enthusiasm buoyant. This particular clematis is a great evergreen eye-catcher for a pergola or an archway – just make sure it is visible from the house or a path, as you don't want it hidden away. As might be quite obvious from the name, it was originally discovered at the RHS garden at Wisley, an excellent place to visit if you want to see a world-class winter garden.

Regular pruning is not needed but if it gets straggly, cut it back after flowering in spring.

Height x Spread 3m x 1m

PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE

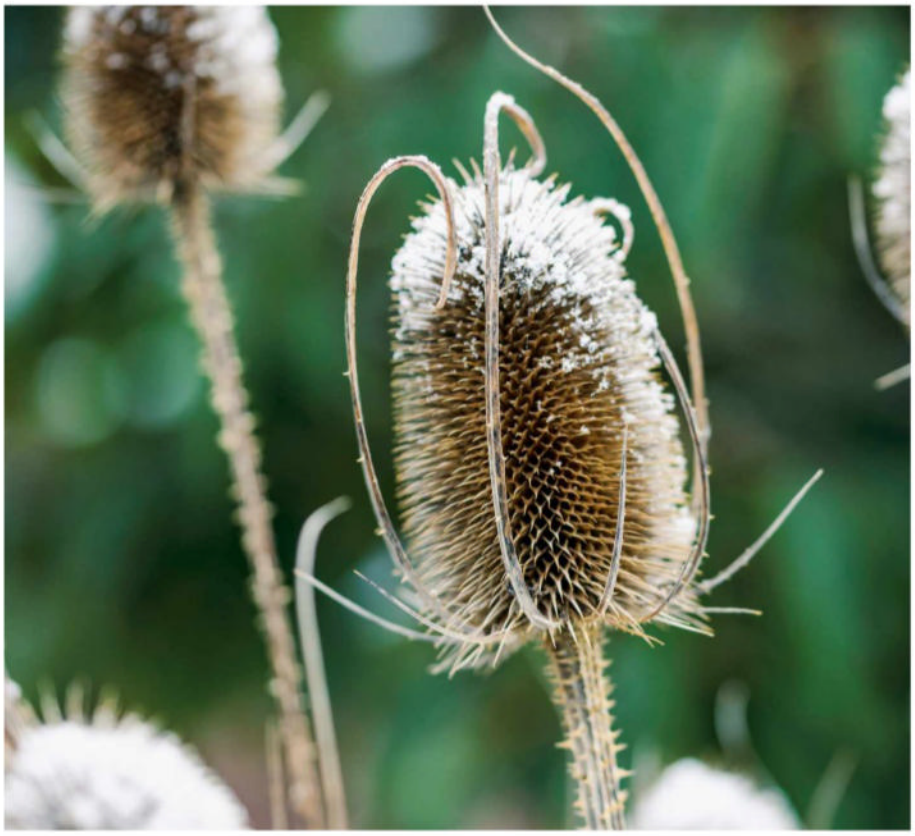


RED ALERT

An evergreen stalwart with pinky-white flowers in spring. Especially popular for winter pots where they provide a strong structure while we wait for the bulbs to start popping up around them. As an added extra, those scarlet berries give a bit of zingy colour to liven up what can be seen as quite a grey and drippy month.

Skimmia japonica

Sweetly scented flowers. Best kept out of full sun as the leaves will frazzle. **H x S** 2m x 1m



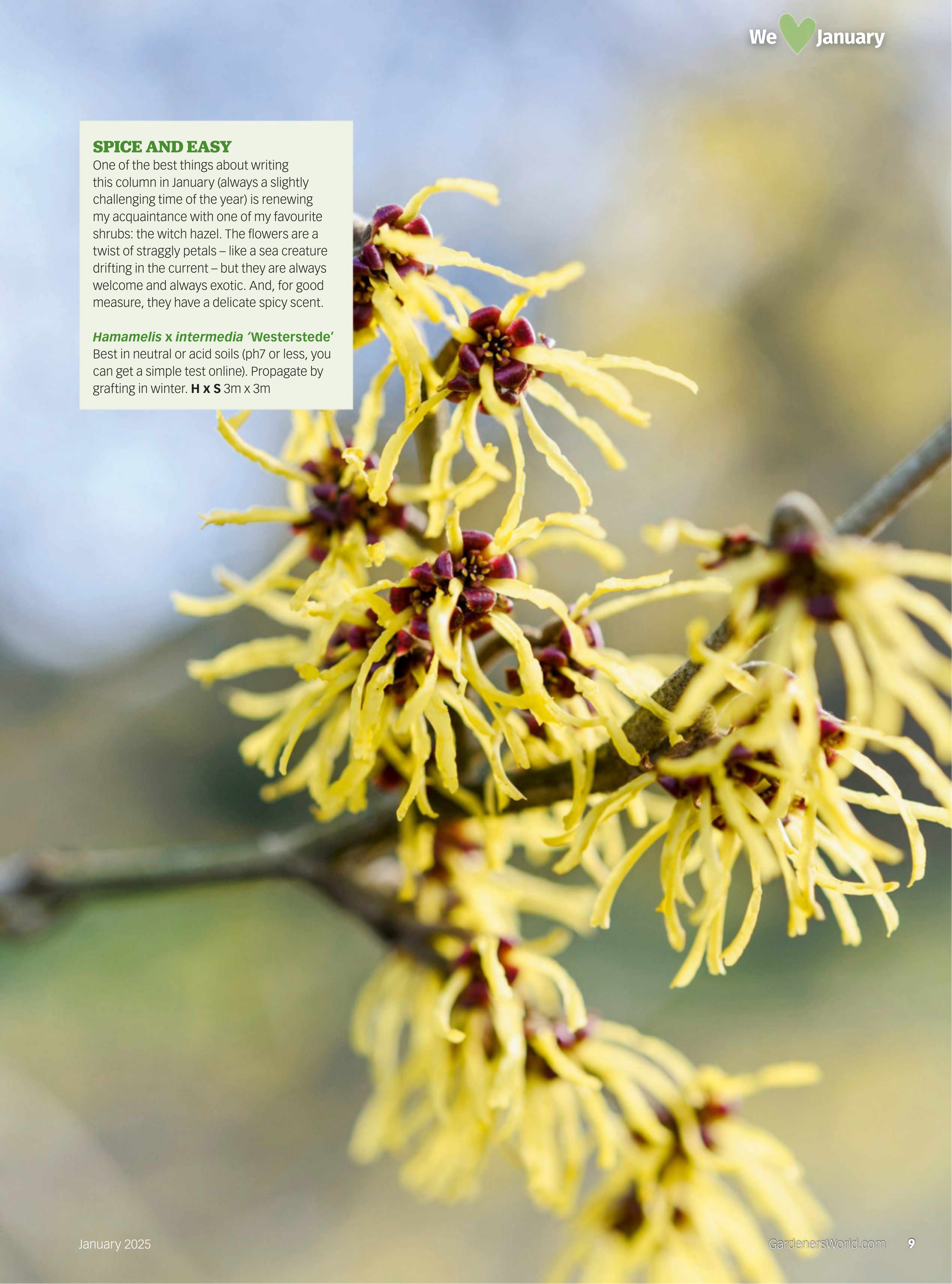
COMB THROUGH HISTORY

Teasels offer one of the longest lasting native seedheads: they will withstand the worst weather and will be adding a bit of skeletal architecture to our wilder borders right up until spring, looking magnificent silhouetted against a low winter sun. The spiky seedheads were historically used as combs to untangle and smooth out wool and other fabrics until superceded by the much less romantic metal alternative.

Dipsacus fullonum

Biennial, so flowers in the second year of growth. Easy to grow from scattered seed. Attracts charms of goldfinches. **H x S** 2m x 75cm

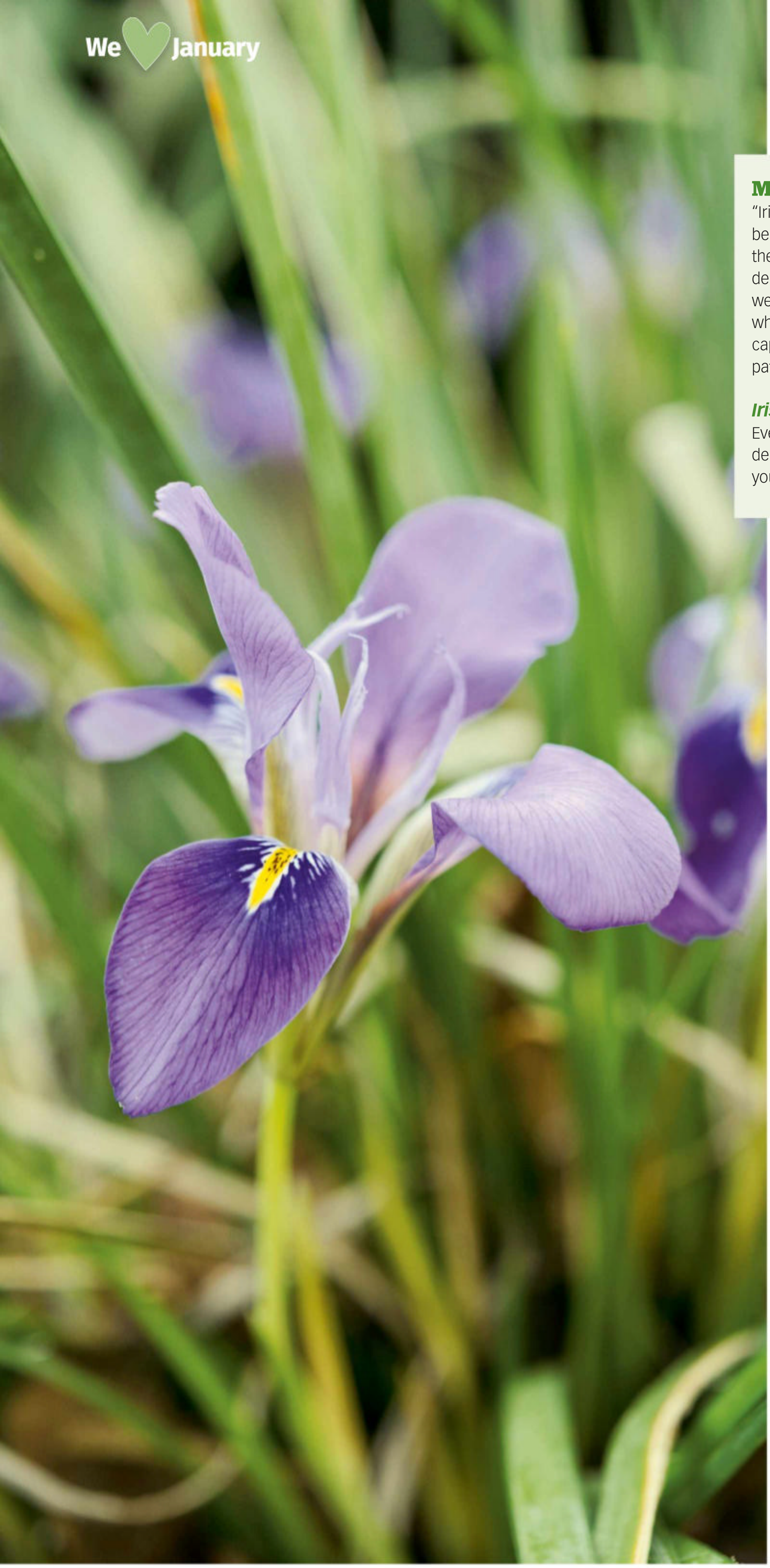
PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM



SPICE AND EASY

One of the best things about writing this column in January (always a slightly challenging time of the year) is renewing my acquaintance with one of my favourite shrubs: the witch hazel. The flowers are a twist of straggly petals – like a sea creature drifting in the current – but they are always welcome and always exotic. And, for good measure, they have a delicate spicy scent.

***Hamamelis* x *intermedia* ‘Westerstede’**
Best in neutral or acid soils (ph7 or less, you can get a simple test online). Propagate by grafting in winter. **H x S** 3m x 3m



MID-WINTER WONDERS

"Irises? In the depths of winter? Surely there must be some mistake here as we are not expecting them until at least May." Rest assured, there is no deception here as these are the earliest iris and well worth growing, not only for their welcome whisper of colour but also because of the flowers' captivating scent. Find a corner for them near a path and give yourself a winter treat.

Iris unguicularis 'Mary Barnard'

Evergreen leaves. Pretty easy to grow given a decently draining soil and as much sunshine as you can muster. **H x S** 40cm x 40cm

WINNING RECIPE

If you were an athlete in ancient Greece who had just won the wrestling or the 100m dash, rather than getting a chunky Gold Medal or a valuable running shoe endorsement, you would have been rewarded with a laurel wreath. Same thing if you were a victorious Roman general just home from smiting the Gauls. Nowadays, we tend to use bay leaves mostly for stews, which is not quite as glamorous.

Laurus nobilis

Fine evergreen shrub or tree. Can be clipped and trained. Flowers in spring. Not good for wetter soils. **H x S** 10m x 10m

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

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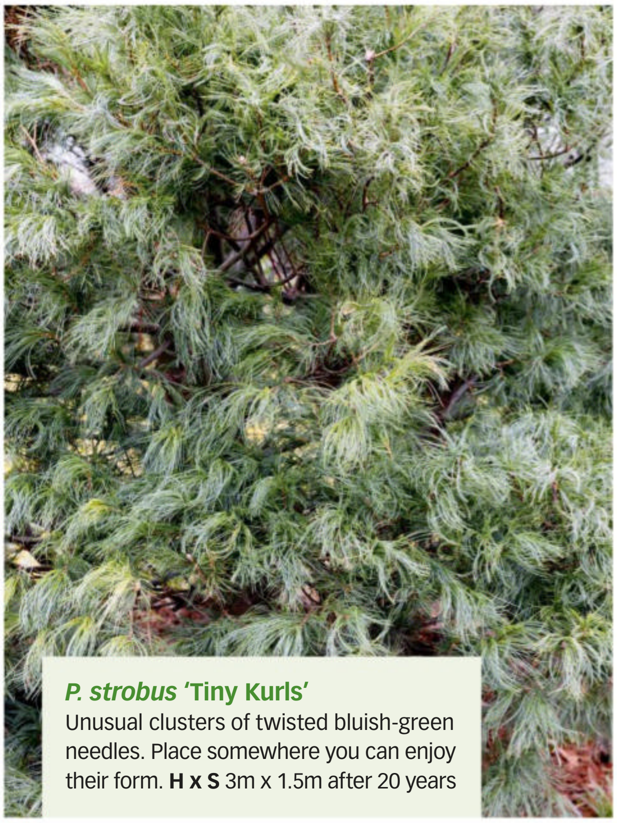
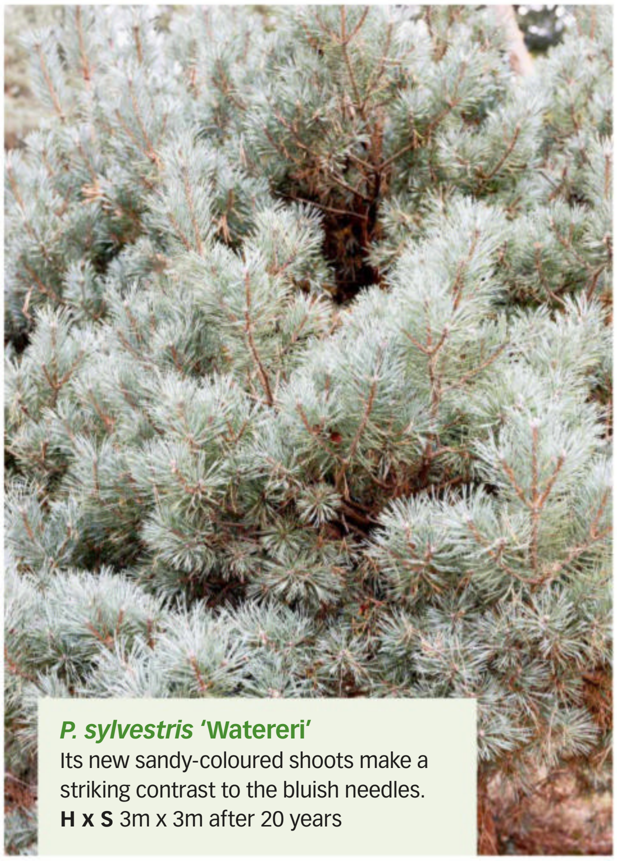
***Pinus sylvestris* 'Chantry Blue'**
Perhaps the bluest of the pines, it forms an upright, pyramidal shape. **Height x Spread** 2.5m x 1.5m after 20 years



***P. strobus* 'Tiny Kurls'**
Unusual clusters of twisted bluish-green needles. Place somewhere you can enjoy their form. **H x S** 3m x 1.5m after 20 years

***P. contorta* 'Chief Joseph'**
Neat and slow growing, with twisted dark-green needles that turn rich gold in winter. **H x S** 3m x 1.5m after 20 years

RHS AWARD OF GARDEN MERIT

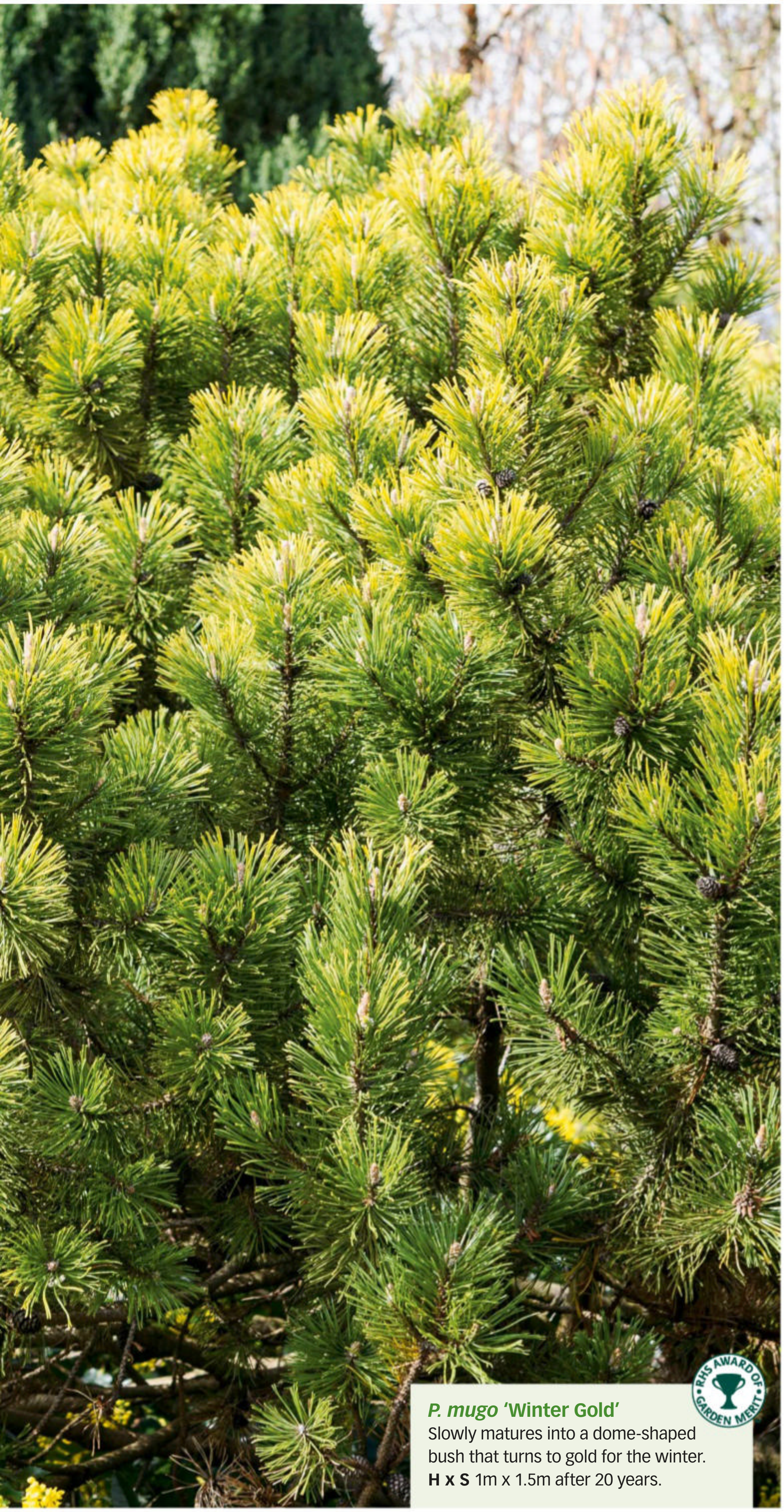


***P. sylvestris* 'Watereri'**
Its new sandy-coloured shoots make a striking contrast to the bluish needles. **H x S** 3m x 3m after 20 years

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; JSAON INGRAM

Pines

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Attractive new growth			🟩	🟩								
Evergreen foliage	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥



P. mugo **'Winter Gold'**
Slowly matures into a dome-shaped bush that turns to gold for the winter.
H x S 1m x 1.5m after 20 years.

Expert's choice

Pines

Never considered planting a pine? **Graham Rice** recommends five compact, well-shaped varieties with particularly attractive foliage

As one of only three British native conifers, the Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) is found growing in every county in the British Isles. In Scotland it's truly native and is an important feature of the landscape. At the opposite end of Britain, Scots pines have invaded the sandy heathlands in the south of England, where they're not native, and have become a threat to the native vegetation. For many years, the RSPB in Dorset even organised annual 'Pull a Pine' days to help remove the threat to the natural heath habitat.

But have no fear, I've chosen five varieties of pines that are very well behaved and will refrain from hopping the fence to set up home in next door's garden. At the same time they provide attractive shapes and/or colourful winter foliage, and will never grow tall enough to overshadow everything else in your garden.

In fact these pines are about the most reliable and adaptable shrubs and small trees we can grow. The only problem is that the range of varieties available at garden centres is often very restricted and even mail-order suppliers may have limited stocks. So I'd suggest bringing a little flexibility to your choice.

Oh, and since you ask, the other two British native conifers are the juniper and the yew.

- **Position** Pines are generally adaptable, but prefer free-draining soil in full sun. Rich conditions can lead to less attractive, more open growth that's more easily weighed down by snow. Compact pines make good container specimens.
- **Care** Generally winter hardy anywhere in the UK. Drought tolerant when established. Be sure to stand container plants on pot feet to ensure good drainage.
- **Pruning** Not usually necessary, except to make good after damage.
- **Where to buy** acorntreesandshrubs.co.uk, 01884 881633; architecturalplants.com, 01798 879213; ashwoodnurseries.com, 01384 401996; larchcottage.co.uk, 01931 712404

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Flowers Jul-Aug

- ***Gladiolus* Emmy**
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H x S 60cm x 15cm
F Jul-Aug

- ***Gladiolus* Amber**
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H x S 70cm x 20cm
F Jul-Aug

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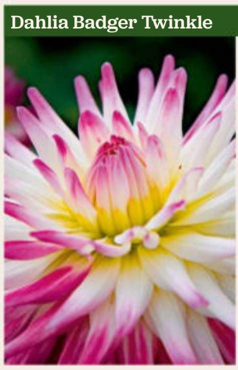

A semi-cactus dahlia with white and purple-pink petals that taper to a point.
H x S 1.2m x 90cm
F Jul-Oct
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Gladioli Mixed

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H x S 60cm x 15cm
F Jul-Aug
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■ 100 corms ~~£25.98~~ **£17.99 SAVE £7.99** *(KB0061)*

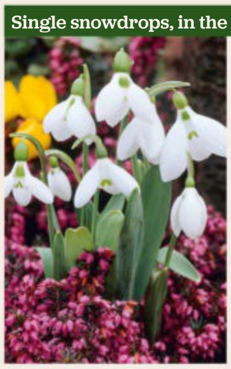
Begonia Non-Stop Mix

Striking double flowers.
H x S 30cm x 30cm
F Jul-Oct
■ 10 tubers ~~£13.99~~ **£11.99 SAVE £2** *(16240)*
■ 20 tubers ~~£27.98~~ **£18.99 SAVE £8.99** *(KC8277)*
■ 40 tubers ~~£55.96~~ **£27.99 SAVE £27.97** *(KA3816)*

Giant Oriental Lily Collection

Eyecatching blooms.
H x S 90cm x 30cm
F Jul-Aug
■ 12 bulbs ~~£15.99~~ **£12.99 SAVE £3** *(KA2624)*
■ 24 bulbs ~~£31.98~~ **£19.99 SAVE £11.99** *(KF0564)*
■ 48 bulbs ~~£63.96~~ **£26.99 SAVE £36.97** *(KF4676)*

Single snowdrops, in the green



Graceful, nodding snowdrops that signal winter's end.
H x S 15cm x 10cm
F Feb-Mar
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The Full Monty

What is it that makes the British approach to gardening unique in the world? There's so much more to it than just our climate, says **Monty**

This month my new television series *Monty Don's British Gardens* takes to the screen. I am extremely happy with it but it has taken an awful lot of work and not a little difficulty getting there. Some of this is simply because it has been a big project with over 60 gardens visited and filmed to make five hours of television. The last time I did anything approaching this scale was when we made *Around the World in 80 Gardens* 17 years ago.

Some of the difficulty was because we filmed over two summers of dreadful weather – but then perhaps that just makes the new series especially true to British gardening conditions. But most of the problems – such as they were – can be put down to the fact that so many British gardens are beautiful in much the same way.

This is because Britain has such ideal conditions for growing a huge range of plants. For a start the weather is perfect. We complain about it of course and, yes, it can be a bit brisk when the wind cuts across the North Sea, and East Anglia has half the rainfall of Longmeadow; but in the wider scheme of things this makes very little real difference to how we garden. We can grow almost anything anywhere and we have a huge range of plants available. This means we can freely indulge almost any horticultural bent or expression.

So in a small country with largely uniform weather and growing conditions the expressions of this are bound to be superficially similar. But the similarity is cultural as well as climatic, cutting across class, money, circumstance and situation. A garden made in the back alleyways of Belfast or an allotment in Nottingham share exactly the same desires and even needs of grand gardens such as Great Dixter, Sissinghurst or Bodnant.

But it is not just about the resulting gardens, however lovely or inspiring they might be. Gardening in Britain has a cultural importance and role that is, in my experience, unique. We take it for granted that everyone might do it and that most do. But this is extremely unusual and, in my experience, distinguishes it from the rest of the world.

By and large gardening is still viewed across much of the world as a means to the end of creating and maintaining a beautiful garden. You do not do it yourself unless you cannot afford to pay someone else to do it for you, any more than you build your own house or service your own car. But from early in the 19th century, with the enormous popularity of periodicals such as Joseph Paxton's *Gardeners' Chronicle* and JC Loudon's *The Gardener's Magazine*, practical advice and information was liberally available and greedily absorbed. Gardening was seen as a noble and creative outlet spanning all classes of society.

> *"Gardening cuts through all layers of British life in a way matched only by sport"*

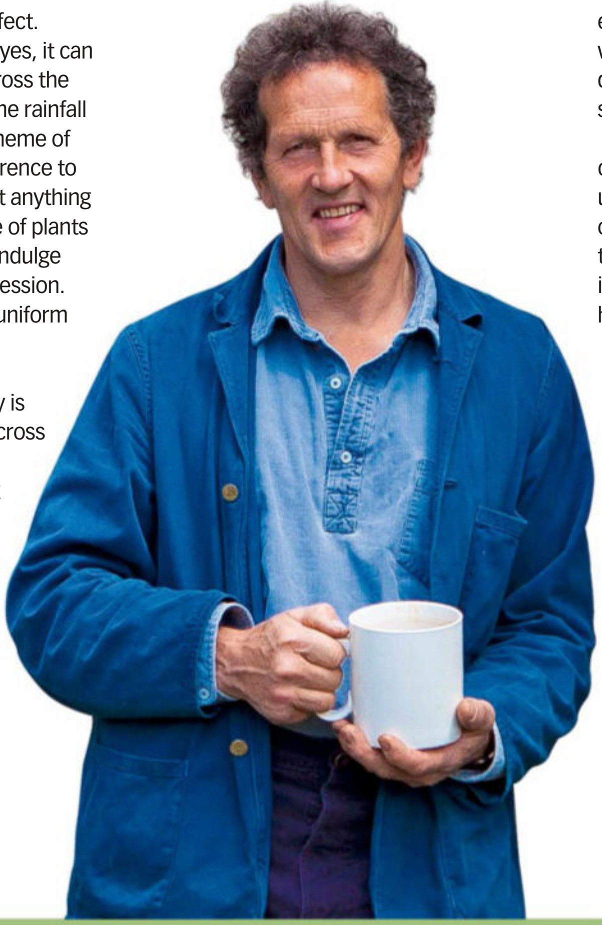


PHOTO: MARSHA ARNOLD

For all its self-conscious 21st century multicultural aspirations, Britain is still a country where class has a huge influence. But gardening cuts through all layers of British life in a way that perhaps only sport can match.

This remains as true today as it ever was. To be a good gardener in Britain is seen to be as admirable as owning a good garden, and if it is evident that you have done the gardening yourself then your garden is regarded with even greater admiration and respect.

This fits in well with the British love of amateurism. The traditional and very professional 'Head Gardener' was respected for his (invariably it was male) knowledge and experience, but he was also an outdoor servant. The keen amateur however came – and still comes – from every walk of life and every gradation and niche of British class, as well as both sexes. They often have a huge depth of knowledge and there are millions of superb amateur gardeners across the country.

Therefore a number of different factors all come together to make gardens in Britain unlike any others. There was the development of private urban and suburban gardens when the country was industrialising and becoming increasingly urban, making the back garden, however humble, a personal Arcadian idyll. And last, but by no means least, gardens have become one of the few places in which private artistic ideals and expressions can flower despite our characteristic national reticence. Put all this together and gardens and gardening have a greater central importance in British cultural and domestic life than any other nation.

So, my five trips around the country evolved into something much more than just a celebration of lovely gardens. The new series is an insight into the British psyche where we are at our most private and comfortable – in the garden.

Monty

BBC TWO

MONTY ON TV Catch *Monty Don's British Gardens* from 8pm, Friday 10 January on BBC Two. And hear Monty's latest podcast, on winter at Longmeadow, at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

Have your say

The view from your side of the fence

HOT TOPIC

Burning issue

I read Flo Headlam's article *Is burning garden waste outdated in the age of composting?* (GardenersWorld.com/premium) with interest.

We have taken on a large garden which needs a lot of sorting out, and it does create a lot of material to be either composted or burned. I think it's perfectly reasonable to use a sensible mix of both options.

Perhaps if we lived in a town composting and a green bin might suffice, but we are in the countryside and have to manage wisteria and yew cuttings, which we can't let our friends' sheep get access to. I also want to burn diseased material.

I am very considerate of our neighbours and never light fires until evenings, and only with the wind in a favourable direction.

Lindsay Hardy, by email

Not all materials compost at the same rate, but chopping them up always helps

I am a gardener by trade and fully support composting everything that is suitable. But as the gardens I look after are quite large and in the countryside, there are some things that aren't compostable – well only if you can give it many years – like branches and strong brambles, so I see both sides.

Mark Heath, by email

WE SAY: *With tougher materials, also try laying branches in a corner for wildlife, and shredding woody stems.*

Small birds face competition from larger birds at some feeders, and may miss out

Battle of the birds

Further to one of your readers' concerns regarding feeding wild birds (*Have Your Say*, December issue), I too have had issues with the larger birds devouring food put out in my ground feeders.

My husband bought me an adjustable cage to put over the feeder. It deters the larger birds but allows smaller birds to feed on the sunflower seeds and meal worms.

In the mornings it is a joy to watch the hive of activity, especially at this time of the year.

Cynthia Townsend, by email

WE SAY: *To find out more about feeding wild birds see the feature on p80, and listen to our chat with naturalist Nick Acheson at* ***GardenersWorld.com/podcast***

Tree of life

I've found a good way to give my Christmas tree a second life.

I strip off and lay the branches around my old rhododendron, which is now growing better than ever. The trunk goes at the base of the hawthorn hedge to rot down slowly.

It's great to know the tree will continue to benefit the garden long after Christmas.

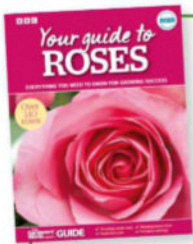
Sharna Mitchell, Lancashire

Woodland mystery

I have lived close to an old oak woodland for over 40 years and was amazed at the lack of acorns last year! Is there an explanation for this? Have others noticed anything similar in their oak woodlands? Is it a weather phenomenon or global warming at work?

Steve Radcliffe, Cheshire

Woodland Trust expert Tom Walsh says: *"This has been a very poor year for acorns! Yields do vary considerably from year to year, but we think the exceptionally rainy weather we experienced in April and May last year may have washed pollen out of the air. According to the Met Office, April had the highest monthly rainfall since 2012 in the UK, and the sixth highest total since 1836!"*



This month's prize

The writer of each letter published this month will receive ***Your Guide to Roses***, full of expert growing advice and the best rose varieties to grow. For more on all our gardening guides, go to **bit.ly/guides-gw**

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/BARBANNA/CONNECT/DIONISVERO

Note to readers

This will be the last time we publish your letters in the magazine, but we would love to hear from everyone on our social channels (see page 3), and please keep sending your garden queries to q&a@gardenersworld.com and any general queries to magazine@gardenersworld.com

ACROSS 1 Fat balls **6** Spot **7** Oil **8** Gorse **9** Eyed **10** Teasels **13** Aster **14** Tarragon **16** Noble **19** Strain **20** Granny's **21** Silene **22** Sieve

DOWN 1 Frost **2** Tilia **3** Algae **4** Lords **5** Bonemeal **6** Seeds **11** Eranthis **12** Spreader **13** Annuals **15** Ginger **17** Bonne **18** Elsie

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Over the fence

Organic or 'veganic' gardening: which method is best for the planet?

Cleve West is an award-winning garden designer and author of *The Garden of Vegan* (Pimpernel Press, £20)

Charles Dowding is a leading proponent of no-dig gardening, and author of many books on the topic

Veganic gardening (derived from the words 'vegan' and 'organic') is similar to organic gardening but uses plant-based inputs instead of animal-based fertilisers such as blood, fish and bone meal, stable manure or compost containing animal renderings. It aspires to be a closed system with no external inputs, which is more sustainable than conventional growing.

Animal agriculture is not only inefficient, it also has a detrimental effect on the environment, not least from methane and CO_2 emissions.

Veganic techniques involve the use of plant-based compost, no-dig systems, wood chip, green manures, cover crops, mineral amendments and even weeds to enrich the soil. This boosts nutrient availability, water retention and drainage to create a nourishing place for beneficial lifeforms to thrive within.

> *"Animal agriculture is not only inefficient, it has a negative effect on the environment"*

Veganic growing also uses less by way of resources and creates healthier soil with a higher organic content that absorbs and retains water more effectively, making it resilient to drought and erosion.

As with organic growing, avoiding the use of pesticides and herbicides allows insects, birds and invertebrates to flourish in an ecosystem where predator-prey cycles help maintain balance.

While, historically, it's been difficult to obtain food where there hasn't been a degree of animal exploitation, it's encouraging to see pioneers in the veganic movement helping farmers to transition away from animal agriculture towards more sustainable and cruelty-free methods. As an allotment tenant, learning how to grow food sustainably without compromising my vegan principles has been a revelation. It's still work in progress but makes so much sense as a more practical, balanced and sustainable approach to growing while reducing our environmental impact.

The future is veganic.

Organic gardening, for me, means to use all available wastes and convert them to food for soil life in the form of compost. I do not see value in discriminating, on ideological grounds, against a waste that comes available. All wastes have value and need to be both used and appreciated.

I understand the desire for avoidance of cruelty to animals and insects. This has certain logical consequences, in particular that one leaves soil undisturbed, because it's full of living organisms. Wanting to preserve and encourage them is a major reason for adopting the no-dig method of gardening.

On the other hand, I do not see any encouragement of cruelty to animals through using certain of their waste products. Horse manure in particular, exists whether or not we choose to spread it on soil, or use it to make compost. And for anybody keeping chickens at home to have eggs, their manure is a valuable resource. Waste products of all animals are food for soil organisms. I don't see it as a cruel thing to keep a few chickens. I'm aware, however, that this is a matter of opinion, and I think that's why this debate will continue!

> *"The key point is to feed and enliven soil with all wastes coming available"*

I feel it's important to be clear on the parameters here. For example, I would never support 100 per cent avoidance of animal manure, " This Magazine Free On SoftArchive .is" partly because we are animals and our manure is valuable! For me, the key point is to feed and enliven soil with all wastes coming available.

I would not use manures from intensive agriculture, because that often is cruel to animals and uses, for example, antibiotics, which I do not want to bring into my garden. On the other hand, there are many farmed animals that are kept in healthy, happy conditions and their waste products are a valuable resource for .gardeners to use

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM; REBEKAH KENNINGTON

Have your say

Which method is best for the environment, veganic or organic? Email or write to us with your thoughts at the address on page 18

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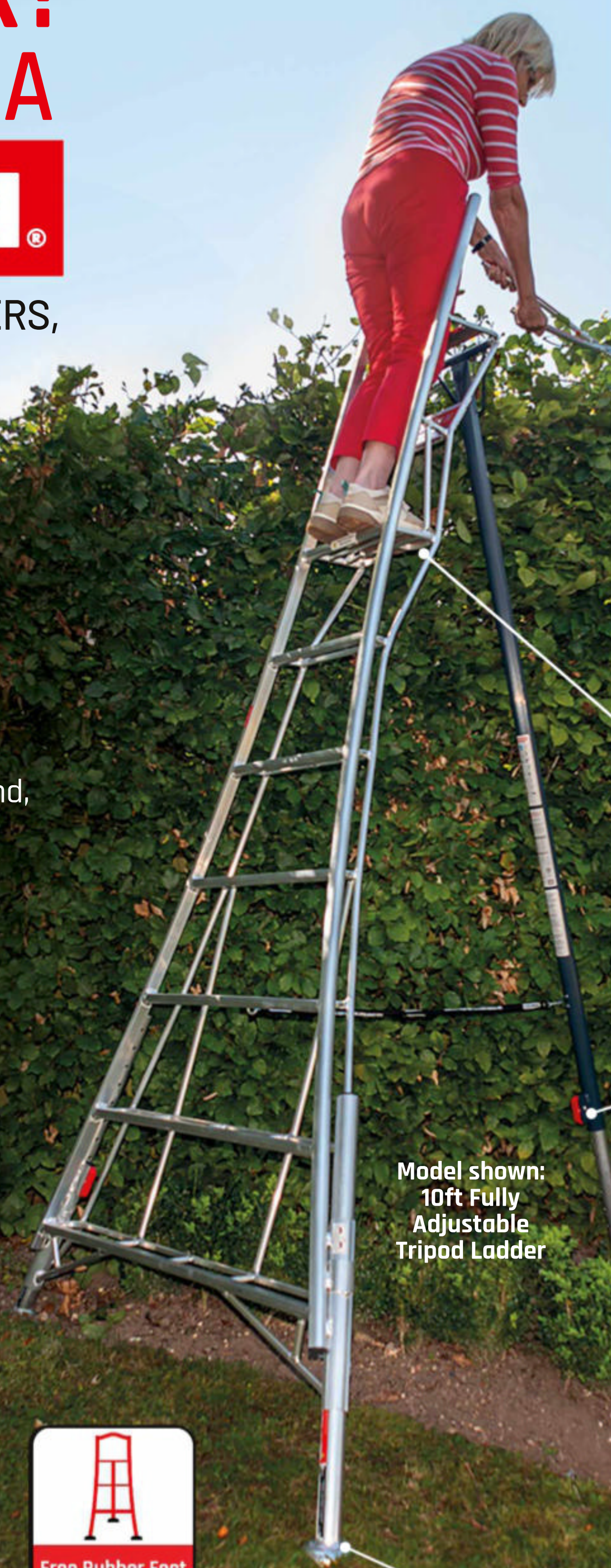

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Digging deeper

Putting the spotlight on the biggest issues in gardening today

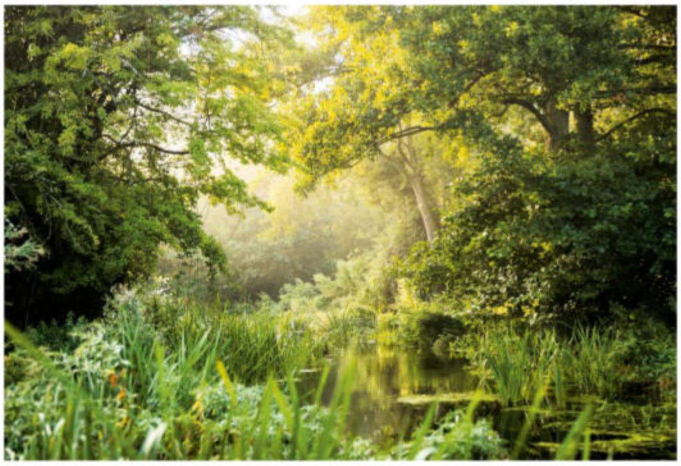
Gardeners together can protect biodiversity

Recent reports such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) *Living Planet Report* make it clear that over the past 50 years, human activity has led to an average decline of 73 per cent in global wildlife populations, with some regions reporting losses of as much as 95 per cent. Meanwhile the International Union for Conservation of Nature's *Red List of Threatened Species* indicates that almost a third of species are at risk of extinction. In terms of biodiversity, the UK isn't faring well either, named as one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world in the *State of Nature Report 2023*.

Ecosystems are being pushed to such an extent that the world is close to irreversible global tipping points, such as the melting of polar ice sheets. Tipping points that, if surpassed, pose grave threats to humanity, most species and Earth's life-support systems.

"We need major system-level change to how we produce food, how we produce energy, and how our financial system works," explains Benedict Dempsey of WWF-UK. In the UK, WWF is calling for government adoption of the *Living Planet Act* to ensure the interconnected issues of nature, climate and food production are legislated in such a way that it leads to the change so urgently needed.

Gardeners can create corridors and safe havens for wildlife



The biodiversity of the UK landscape, such as here on the River Nar in Norfolk, can be replicated in the nation's gardens

While large-scale global changes in behaviour, policies and measures will be essential to avoid the critical tipping points, individuals have a vital part to play. Gardeners are in a unique position, capable of assisting biodiversity in their own outdoor spaces, no matter how big or small.

"Gardens have a vital role in helping to restore our ecosystems. Nature doesn't generally stay still. It moves through the landscape, waterways, coasts and seas. While conserving individual species is essential, we know that nature won't recover unless we make our wider land, rivers and seas more hospitable for wildlife as a whole. By maintaining a nature-friendly garden, you are contributing to making the landscape better for wildlife, providing a stepping stone for nature between different places, and increasing the resilience of our ecosystems," explains Dempsey.

> “Gardens have a vital role in helping to restore our ecosystems”

To assist in the creation of cultivated, nature-based gardens and landscapes, the Royal Horticultural Society's climate resilience research is currently focused on the Plants for Purpose programme. By incorporating plant knowledge with AI, the RHS aims to deliver a knowledge bank providing guidance on right plants, right places and right purposes for climate mitigation and resilience.

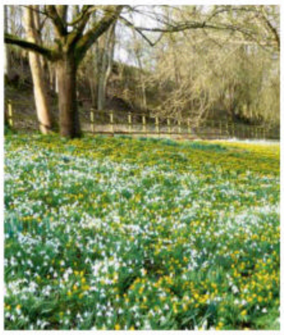
Building climate resilience comes from diversity in plants, explains Alistair Griffiths, RHS Director of Science. "Plant diversity is especially valuable for climate adaptation and mitigation. The more diversity, the more resilience we will have." Especially impactful, considering that the area of UK gardens and landscapes covers 700,000 hectares – equivalent to twice the size of Somerset.

Herein lies the power of our gardens. According to Dempsey, we need to think beyond our gardens in terms of how they fit into the wider landscape. "By providing nature-friendly habitats that can be part of corridors that let wildlife move around. Taking these small actions not only makes a difference to the surrounding ecosystem, but can also boost your mood by connecting with nature and help curb feelings of anxiety about the future of our natural world."

Designing a climate-conscious garden doesn't mean comprising on style. The 2024 RHS Chelsea Flower Show's *Flood Resilient Garden*, designed by Naomi Slade and Dr Ed Barsley, showcased how a thoughtful, climate-conscious design can be a crucial catalyst to improving the wellbeing of the environment, without requiring significant trade-offs. "Climate resilience doesn't have to mean sacrificing aesthetics or functionality – it can instead unlock new opportunities to create greener, more sustainable spaces that thrive even in the face of a changing climate," explains Barsley.

And as conscious consumers, gardeners can also make a substantial difference by actively choosing ethically sourced products, says Dr Griffiths. "If the UK's 30 million gardeners take positive actions to protect and support biodiversity, such as going peat-free or switching to use rainwater instead of mains, this will have a significant impact on unique biodiversity in natural peat bogs and our waterways."

BY PETRA HOYER MILLAR – a gardener, horticultural journalist and editor of ***thedirt.news***



Discover the enchanting snowdrops of Welford Park

Early gates for spring flowers

It's time to start planning your garden visits, to enjoy displays of snowdrops, crocuses, hellebores and irises, as the first of the National Garden Scheme's listings open their gates. Among the earliest is Welford Park in Berkshire on 5 February. See **ngs.org.uk**

Butterflies heading north

Climate change, plus factors such as habitats, weather, pesticide use and pollution, are driving butterflies further northwards, according to the latest Scottish biodiversity indicators. NatureScot reports an increase in 10 species, including speckled woods and red admirals.

In Scotland red admirals have increased 10-fold in 40 years

Many gardeners are already using peat-free composts

Peat-sale ban by end of 2025?

A parliamentary motion banning the sale of peat in England is to have a second reading on 24 January, after a first reading in November by Liberal Democrat, Sarah Dyke. The use of compost made from repurposed materials helps to protect peatlands and create a more sustainable economy.

Helping children grow and thrive

Seed supplier Mr Fothergill's has announced a partnership with The Children's Society, a charity that supports vulnerable children and young people. Together they will help to create safe spaces and resources to encourage young individuals to reach their full potential. Go to **bit.ly/Fothergills-CS**

Gardening can help families bond, learn and grow

Take your pick of Dutch tulips

Over 200,000 tulips can be picked for free by the public

Make a date with National Tulip Day in the Netherlands, on 18 January 2025. This annual event in Amsterdam's Museum Square marks the start of tulip season and visitors can pick free tulips from a garden of over 200,000. **bit.ly/tulip-day**

AUTHOR PHOTO: REBECCA BERNSTEIN. PHOTOS: GETTY/LUIS ALVAREZ, JACKY PARKER PHOTOGRAPHY; JASON INGRAM; HEATHER SKINNER; TPN/VIDIPHOTO; WWF-UK/GREG ARMFIELD

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Sculptural qualities

The Sculpture Park in Surrey is a great destination for a new year stroll. Follow the 2 mile trail through 10 acres of naturalistic woodland and water gardens, to discover more than 600 large outdoor sculptures, beautifully set among the plants. In addition to the many animal-themed artworks, there is plenty of wildlife to spot too.

The sculptures are changed regularly, so it's worth coming back to discover new artworks and enjoy the natural seasonal changes, as winter's stark beauty transforms into lush spring.

ENTRY OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £15. Use online code BBC241. Open all year – for full details, go to **thesculpturepark.com**

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Artistic treasure

At **Compton Verney** in Warwickshire, world-class art combines with glorious Grade II listed parkland for an inspirational day out. The landscaped grounds, designed by Capability Brown, offer picturesque walks and vistas, a serpentine lake, chapel and bold contemporary sculptures, as well as a dramatic avenue of towering Wellingtonia trees.

ENTRY OFFER Collections, exhibitions & park: 2 for 1 £19.80 (£18 booked). Under-18s free. Booking recommended – use code GW241 online. Open all year – for full details, go to **comptonverney.org.uk**

SAVE £9

Crowning glory

Celebrate royal history at **Ashridge House Gardens** in Hertfordshire, once a residence of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. The 190 acres of landscape gardens include historical mementoes of years gone by. Be sure to walk the line of yews believed to date from the early 17th century, part of Humphry Repton's original design, and follow in the footsteps of Princess Victoria to see the impressive oak she planted in 1823. The herb garden was redesigned in 2005 to display a selection of bee-friendly herbs.

ENTRY OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £9. Under-12s free. Booking recommended. Open all year – for details, go to **ashridgehouse.org.uk**

SAVE £7.50

Otterly brilliant

Welcome in the new year at **The Weir Garden** in Herefordshire. It's a magical place in winter, with a riverside walk, walled garden, rockery, mature trees and surrounding parkland to explore. Wildlife is abundant, especially along the River Wye, which is even home to otters – rarely seen, but you may well spot their footprints on the banks. This idyllic riverside location is steeped in history too, with the remains of a Roman bathhouse and traces of a Roman road.

ENTRY OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £7.50. For opening details, go to **nationaltrust.org.uk/the-weir-garden**

PHOTOS: NATIONAL TRUST/ANDREW BUTLER; GARYNUNN.CO.UK

SAVE £5.45

Living laboratory

St Andrews Botanic Garden, Fife, is a peaceful 18-acre haven of woodland walks, meadows and ponds, perfect for winter walks. At the heart of the garden is the new Tangled Bank, where some of Fife's most threatened habitats and landscapes have been recreated. The focus throughout the garden is on experimentation, with innovative ideas to encourage native biodiversity, so you'll find plenty to inspire and enjoy all year round.

ENTRY OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £5.45. Under-18s free. For opening details, go to **standrewsbotanic.org**

Discover more in 2025

If you missed our May issue with the **2 for 1 Gardens** card and guide, you can buy it at **bit.ly/GW2for124**. The card is valid until 2 April 2025. To find more gardens and sign up for seasonal and regional garden choices sent to your inbox, go to **GardenersWorld.com/gardens**

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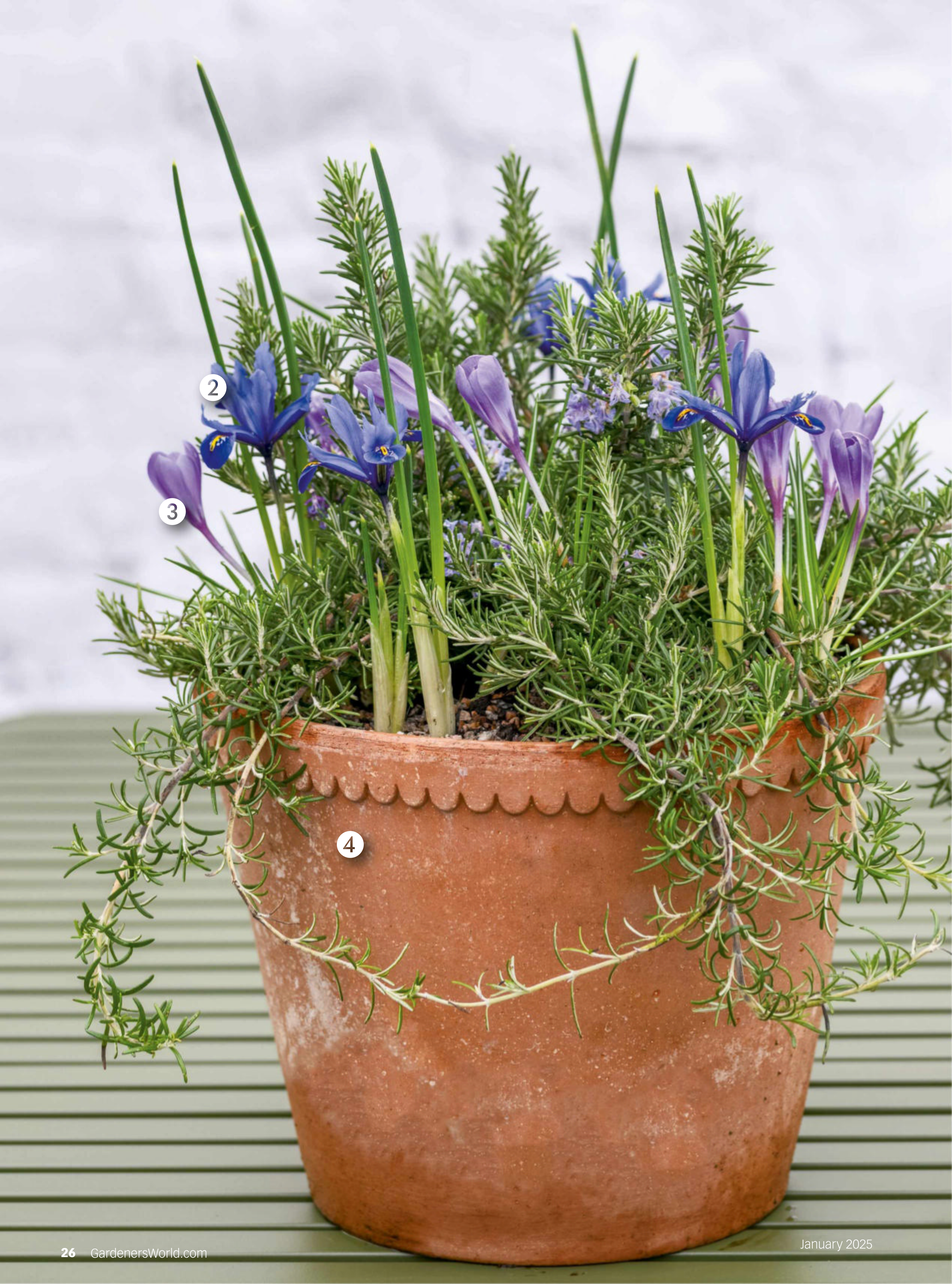
Before visiting a garden remember to check its website for opening and closing times as they can vary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3
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Container of the month

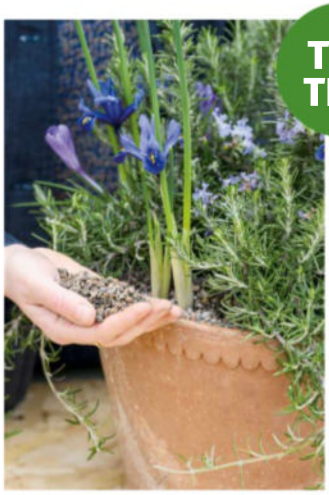
Mark fresh beginnings with a hit of colour, combining bright evergreens and early risers

WORDS LUCY BELLAMY **PHOTOS** JASON INGRAM

New year celebration

Rosemary is an excellent choice for a container all year round, and here I've combined it with small, colourful treasures – winter-flowering bulbs in rich, bright hues – to welcome in the new year. After the crocuses and reticulata irises fade, you can replant the bulbs straight into the garden and the rosemary will continue happily in the pot. A terracotta pot hints at the sun-baked, summer climes that these plants all favour and its porosity means that they don't sit wet in winter. Its scalloped edge and warm colour draw attention to the detail of flowers, and contrast prettily with the silvery-green rosemary. Position the pot where it will be in sun for at least part of the day, ideally on a tabletop where you can see and enjoy it close up.

TOP TIPS



Add a layer of grit, so the lower flowers won't get splashed with compost when it rains.

Plant pots of bulbs without splitting them up to avoid damaging the fragile roots.

WE USED

① 1 x rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*)

② 2 x pots of *Iris* 'Harmony' (3 bulbs per pot)

③ 2 x pots of *Crocus* large-flowered blue (3 per pot)

④ 1 x round terracotta pot (30cm)

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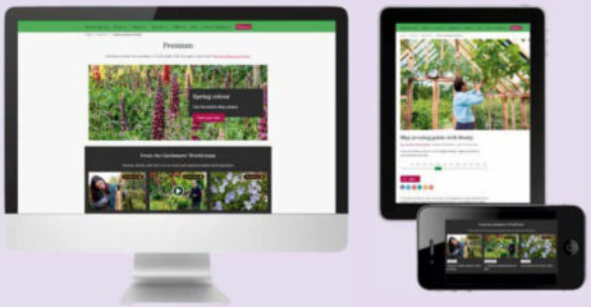

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The Spring Garden in January is a treat for the senses with early blooms from daffodils, hellebores and snowdrops

> *"The presence of scent can be as carefully chosen for your winter garden as for the rest of the year"*

Winter scents

Fragrant flowers can help lift the spirits on cold winter days. **Monty** shares his favourite plants to fill the garden with olfactory joy

Try describing any scent and you may cast around for words but always end up comparing it with another odour in the hope that your listener will recognise it. It is like a conversation in a foreign language of which you have only the scantest knowledge. But the presence of scent, agreeable or otherwise, can be as carefully chosen for your winter garden as for the rest of the year.

Spring in the air

The choice of plants is more limited, but their quality is not. Some of the best fragrant shrubs are winter flowering and powerfully scented to entice the few pollinating insects around at that time of year. Many snowdrops have a delicate but delicious fragrance, especially when picked and brought indoors. The common snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, is not especially scented but 'S.Arnott' is worth growing for its exceptional fragrance, not to mention being a good, vigorous flowerer, too.

I grow *Iris reticulata* in pots and raise them under cover so that the weather doesn't spoil their intense purple flowers. Their scent can fill the greenhouse on a sunny February day and they are great to bring indoors to a windowsill when in flower, and they last a surprisingly long time. Crocuses also have fragrance but catching it is tricky unless, like snowdrops, they are brought closer to the nose than the average planting allows. *C. chrysanthus* is perhaps the most fragrant. I have yellow cultivars at Longmeadow, while 'Snow Bunting' is also good.

Honeyed delight

For all the wintry weather they have to cope with, there is a sense that crocuses belong to spring, or at least winter behaving like spring. But some winter-flowering shrubs really do choose the winter as their preferred flowering season rather than taking a march on spring, and some of them have superb fragrance.

None is better than the tiny-flowered winter honeysuckle, *Lonicera fragrantissima*. It is a messy, woody shrub but we can forgive it that for the haunting scent of its flowers. These are ivory-yellow, carried on bare stems (although in mild areas it will be almost evergreen) and would scarcely be noticed in the hurly-burly of a May garden but they earn pride of place at the back end of December. The flowers start in December and continue into March, but January is their month and I always try to have a sprig or two in a tiny vase to fill the kitchen with their sweet scent. It will grow perfectly happily in dry shade and does not need feeding or rich

At Longmeadow, the perfumes from scented snowdrops signify hopes for the gardening year ahead

The table by Monty's potting shed is host to pots filled with bulbs including *Iris reticulata* 'Pauline' and 'Blue Note'

Snowdrops flank one of Longmeadow's many paths with their restful fragrance

> *"Many snowdrops have a delicious fragrance, especially when picked and brought indoors"*

soil as this will only encourage a mass of foliage at the expense of flowers. *L. standishii* is similar but more compact and completely deciduous. *L.* x *purpusii* is the result of a crossing of *L. standishii* and *L. fragrantissima* and is generally reckoned to have a hybrid robustness that combines both its parents' qualities, being very free-flowering and vigorous, so if you are only going to grow one, this is what I would choose.

Daphne mezereum alba is more tricky to grow but worth the trouble because it emits an extraordinarily rich scent from its white flowers (the species *D. mezereum* has pink flowers), which can be out well before Christmas. It likes a protected spot with a little shade and thrives on free-draining but not too dry alkaline soil, such as chalk. It's not a plant for small children as all of it – especially its berries – are toxic.

Wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*) has a fragrance as good as any perfume but also a reputation for being rather tender, so it is a good idea to give it some shelter on a west- or south-facing wall or fence, but other shrubs around it would do the trick. A sprinkling of wood ash in early autumn will help ripen the new wood before winter. It can be trained to climb on a sheltered, sunny wall, and in many ways it is best grown like this, with a clematis using it for support during the summer. It grows best on free-draining soil and, like *Daphne mezereum*, is very happy on chalk or limestone. The blooms are egg-yolk yellow, set off by the scarlet interior base to each petal, and make very good cut flowers. The scent remains much longer if the flowers are kept in a cold room. This tends to be true of all winter-flowering shrubs, which have not evolved to need heat to draw out their fragrance.

There are a number of viburnums that not only offer winter colour and scent but also add touches of pink and white at a time of the year when most flowers are

Viburnum x bodnantense

Chimonanthus

Primula vulgaris

Monty's top picks for seasonal scent

Enjoy fragrance from winter into spring with Monty's favourites for fragrance

WINTER

- **Wintersweet** (*Chimonanthus praecox*), deciduous shrub. **Height x Spread** 4m x 2.5m
- **Bodnant viburnum** (*Viburnum x bodnantense*), deciduous shrub. **H x S** 3m x 2m
- **Winter honeysuckle** (*Lonicera fragrantissima*), deciduous shrub. **H x S** 2m x 3m
- **White-flowered mezereum** (*Daphne mezereum alba*), deciduous shrub. **H x S** 1m x 70cm
- **Sweet box** (*Sarcococca confusa*), evergreen shrub. **H x S** 2m x 1m

SPRING

- **Grape hyacinth** (*Muscari latifolium*), bulb. **H x S** 15cm x 10cm
- ***Clematis armandii***, evergreen climber. **H x S** 5m x 3m
- **Wallflower** (*Erysimum*), biennial/short-lived perennial. **H x S** 75cm x 60cm
- **Primrose** (*Primula vulgaris*), herbaceous perennial. **H x S** 20cm x 35cm
- **Lilac** (*Syringa* species), deciduous shrub. **H x S** 5m x 5m
- **Wild daffodil** (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*). **H x S** 30cm x 10cm

> *"'Lionel Fortescue' mahonia will draw bees to its flowers, whose scent resembles lily of the valley"*

trying to be yellow. The most familiar of the lot, *Viburnum* x *bodnantense* 'Dawn' has pink flowerheads made of florets of tiny individual flowers on bare branches that can start appearing in autumn and last right through to March. 'Charles Lamont' is also pink and 'Deben' almost white. *Viburnum farreri* has a good fragrance and is best outside against a warm wall that will trap its scent. The species' flowers are white tinged with pink, whereas *V.* 'Candidissimum' is pure white.

For years I have struggled to grow witch hazel well and put its reluctance down to our slightly alkaline soil. All witch hazels prefer a neutral to acidic soil that doesn't dry out, and I find they grow best here in full sunshine. Often described as a woodland plant, it is more of an edge-of-wood plant that thrives with at least four hours of good sun and a free-draining but moist soil. I now have, happily situated down by the pond, a *Hamamelis* x *intermedia* 'Diane' – a witch hazel with bright brick-red flowers that look like confetti caught on the branches. This is not the most powerfully fragrant of the witch hazels – that belongs to *H. mollis* or *H. vernalis* – but it does have a subtle, rather beautiful scent nevertheless.

Mahonia is a fragrant evergreen that thrives in dry shade. *Mahonia* x *media* has racemes of pale-yellow flowers emerging from the large, rather spiky, evergreen leaves. It will grow to 1.5-1.8m in time but can be pruned back as is convenient and is an excellent plant for an awkward corner. *M.* x *media* 'Charity' is probably the best known mahonia and will grow to a substantial (and very prickly) shrub, 4m^2, given space and time. However, the first to bloom is *M.* x *media* 'Lionel Fortescue', which will draw all the bees to its upright, primrose-yellow flowers, whose scent strongly resembles that of lily of the valley. The smaller 'Winter Sun' also has deliciously scented flowers. ☐

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NEXT MONTH Monty shares the secrets of success with spring's first seed sowings

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

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GWHY

Arit's 7 deadly sins

Discover **Arit Anderson**'s guilty gardening secrets and how you can turn your own sins into wins

When we think about gardening, it usually brings about positive feelings of doing good and being at one with nature. This may elevate to even feeling virtuous when reflecting on a day of hard work in the garden. I doubt anyone comes in from their outdoor pursuits and discusses the deadly sins they've committed! We have soil under our nails and sweat on our brow, what could we possibly have done wrong?

In the spirit of new year's resolutions, I'm going to look through the lens of the seven deadly sins and confess my own gardening offenses. But as you read mine, I ask that you reflect on yours with a notepad and a cup of tea. Hopefully, this process will provide fresh inspiration on how we can help wildlife, the environment and our wellbeing. So let's explore how to turn over a new leaf in 2025 and transform those deadly sins into garden wins!

Pride: the lawn

When I moved into my house, my 10m x 4.5m plot had the obligatory rectangular lawn and skinny borders. As a novice gardener, I was keen to keep the lawn and invested in the necessary tool kit to keep on top of it. Then a neighbour threw down the gauntlet, "Arit, we have an annual Best Lawn Competition' – don't be upset not to win it!" With water, feed and mower at the ready, my daily and weekly rituals were honed, while my half-moon tool, sharpened to perfection, kept those lawn edges crisp alongside the borders. My pride overspilled as that year I was announced the winner!

FROM SIN TO WIN: Over time I've learned that a garden needs more than an immaculate lawn to be an enticing place for wildlife. It's important to have areas of longer grass where invertebrates such as moths, butterflies, craneflies and sawflies can shelter, feed and breed. In turn they're a food source for mammals and birds. By not using harmful chemicals, relaxing our mowing regime and welcoming wildflowers into our lawns (yes, that includes dandelions), we can enjoy the pride of increasing the biodiversity in our gardens.

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

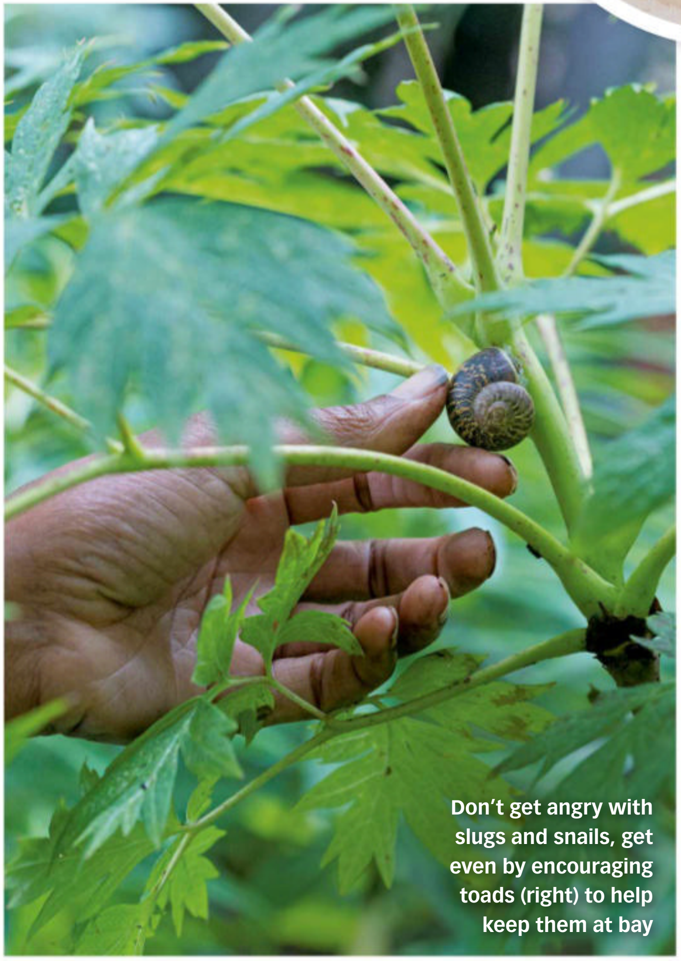
Instead of taking pride in a perfect lawn, let the grass grow longer and add wildflowers such as field scabious (left) to help pollinators

Greed: tools

It's nigh on impossible to go to a garden centre or garden show without looking at new tools. It's as if the memory of what you already own has been erased and any recollection of what's languishing in your tool bag has vanished. Those special secateurs that cut through thick twigs like butter, or the long-handled border spade that is obviously going to save your back, seem to have a way of finding themselves into your basket. It's only when the receipt is out of date that the memory floods back and you have to admit you now own several of each!

FROM SIN TO WIN: The right tool for the right job is vital, but it's also useful to review what we have. Do we really need that fancy new pair of secateurs or, with a little restoration, can we give the old pair a new lease of life? When I really do need a tool, I love going to vintage stalls and buying restored ones. But if you're not confident repairing or sharpening your own tools, then look online for businesses offering this service. Consider donating tools you don't use too.

Check how many secateurs and snips you have before buying more, then look after them well so they last for years

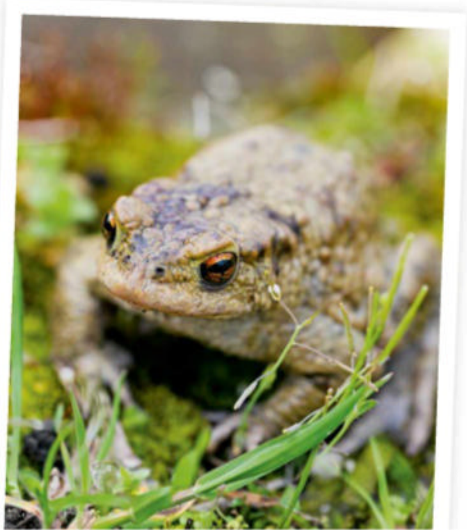


Don't get angry with slugs and snails, get even by encouraging toads (right) to help keep them at bay

Wrath: slugs and snails

It was only when my neighbour texted me at 6.30am – midway through my regular slug patrol, to ask what I was doing – that I realised slugs and snails were taking over my life! Devouring my lupins and demolishing my dahlias: my wrath is at what they do, not what they are. And they have excellent homing instincts too, so relocating them over the fence (method of travel up to you) is futile, as they'll be back in no time.

FROM SIN TO WIN: There are over 100 species of slugs and snails in the UK, but only a few feed on living plants. Most eat the decaying matter in our gardens and really are our friends. So we should focus our efforts on minimising the unwanted damage that the annoying few cause. Plant choice is key: thick or waxy leaves are less appealing. Protect young plants and provide habitats for predators such as toads, slow worms, ground beetles and birds. Slugs and snails mainly feed at night and like cool damp conditions, so if you need to water, do it in the morning. This gives plants a good start to the day and the ground has a chance to dry out before nightfall.



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Envy: the perfect allotment

Oh, to have an allotment! The space to grow more of my own, chat with fellow growers, pick up great tips and share produce along the way. My good friend Vicky is a great allotmenteer and a great cook. She knows I'm envious of her plot and all that she achieves each year. But, alas, I must come to terms with the fact that this is not to be my fortune – I can merely look on and dream.

FROM SIN TO WIN: What I have learned is that we don't really need an allotment to grow some food or beneficial flowers to feel good. It's perfectly viable to convert part of a border to growing veg, or intersperse them among your ornamental plants. I have some large containers in my side return and each year a couple of them are given over to something edible. Borage, cucumbers, nasturtiums, even cauliflowers – all have been trialled in my miniscule container allotment. As tiny as the harvest is, it feels good to do it and the envy I feel diminishes – for now!

If an allotment isn't an option, then grow a few prized crops in containers (left)

Get set to sow flowering annuals this spring, from vibrant marigolds to bee-friendly cosmos (inset)

Lust: a flower farm

Lust is an intense desire for something, and in my case that's to own a flower farm or dedicated cutting garden. There's something magical about walking through an abundance of flowers with snips in hand, knowing there is enough to cut and plenty left for wildlife to enjoy too. It's perhaps not the worst deadly sin to be guilty of, but nonetheless lust is on the list as I strive to be happier with the plot I've got.

FROM SIN TO WIN: However small our gardens, it's important to include flowers that bring us joy. Growing annuals from seed is so pleasurable, and because their life's mission is to flower and set seed, they keep blooming if you pick them regularly. They sit so well alongside other floral favourites such as roses, dahlias and pollinator-friendly perennials – my list is long. So when space is tight, we have to juggle our loves, but that's the charm of gardening!

Gluttony: seeds

I don't think I'm a greedy person by nature. Of course I've overeaten at times, wishing my waistband was slightly looser, but in gardening terms I've been struggling to think of anything I've gorged myself on. Then the boxes on the shelf caught my eye… overspilling with seed packets. All those little packets of promise with my gardening hopes tucked away inside. But to grow them all, I would need that enviable allotment and the flower farm I desire...

FROM SIN TO WIN: The joy of talking with a passionate grower wanting to share their bounty should never be given up, and that joy can be passed on by sharing seeds with others. When you collect seeds from your own plants, you are able to keep the genetics of your plant and its adaptions to your site, so you're building your very own seed bank. Of course buying seeds from reputable suppliers is great too, but make sure you keep an eye on the expiry dates and donate any excess as often as you can… note to self!

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

Seduced by tempting packets and by seedpods full of promise, it's easy to acquire more seeds than you can sow

Most gardeners don't take enough time to sit and relax in their gardens, but a bit of gentle pottering (inset) can be very beneficial too

Sloth: not enough?

Relaxing in a deckchair, book in hand, dozing in the sun: it's not often that I take time out in my own garden to literally do nothing. On those rare occasions, it feels like pure indulgence, and it's not long before I'm up again, doing some chores. I think it only really becomes a sin if the sloth starts to stack up and things don't get done, so your plants suffer neglect.

FROM SIN TO WIN: If you can't sit and do nothing for very long, then pottering in the garden is a great way to relax while getting a few simple jobs done too. Just being in a garden or among nature is good for us. Scientists have found a positive health benefit when people spend at least two hours a week in nature, and doctors can now prescribe gardening therapy to support or replace pills and potions. We all need to take time out to de-stress in nature, letting our bodies rest and our minds daydream. It's in the magical space of 'nothingness' that healing can take place.

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PEOPLE'S CHOICE

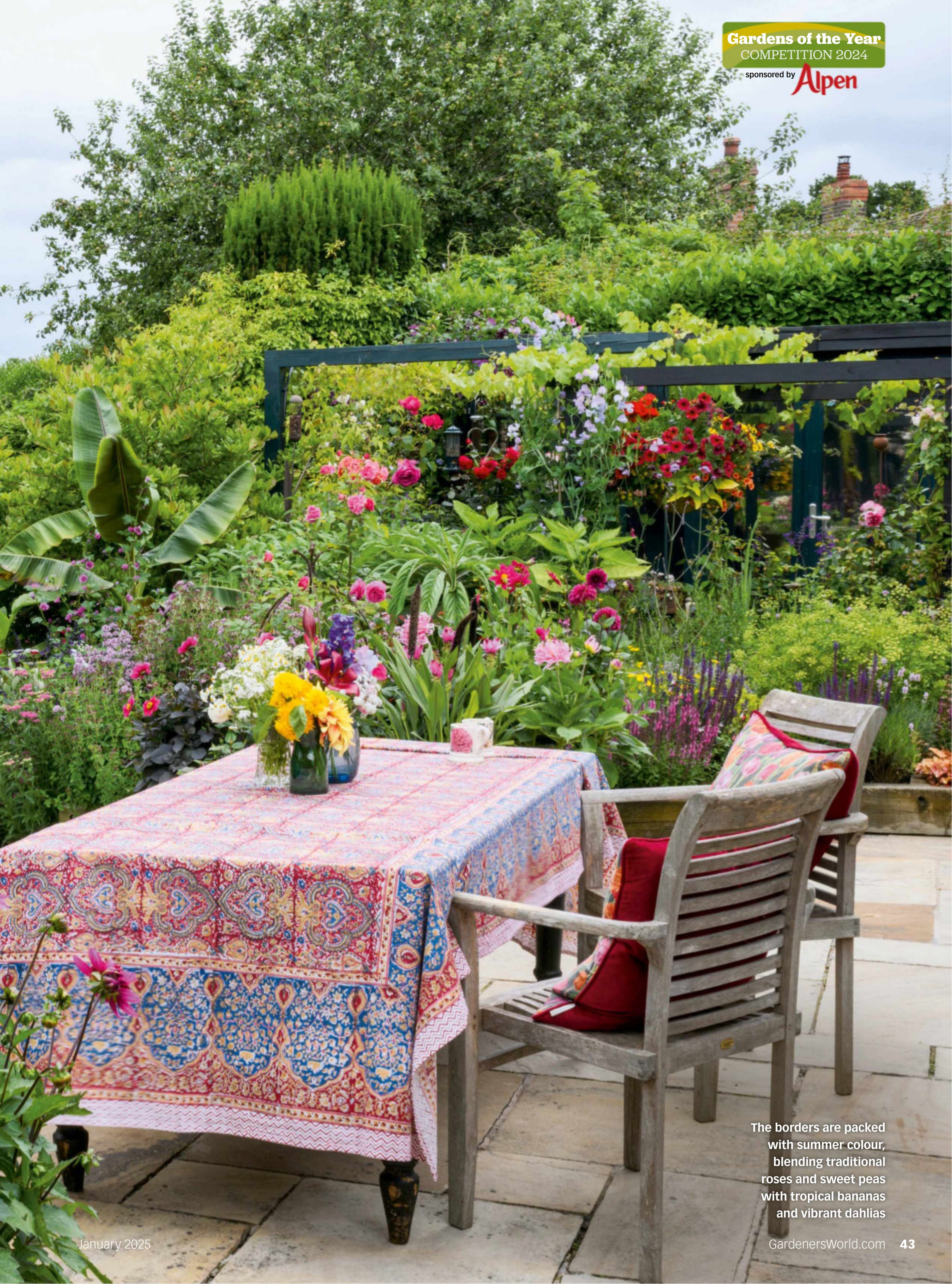
Jo and Andi Butler

More than 9,000 of you voted in the People's Choice, and Jo and Andi's travel-inspired garden came out tops. Showcasing their passion for plants and upcycling, it's a wonderful place to relax and welcome visitors

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM **WORDS** SONYA PATEL ELLIS

Jo and Andi Butler

"Our garden inspiration is eclectic – a combination of travel, particularly around Asia, and our love of traditional English gardens"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The borders are packed with summer colour, blending traditional roses and sweet peas with tropical bananas and vibrant dahlias

When Jo and Andi moved to their relatively large, rural garden in Telford, Shropshire, over 15 years ago, it was dominated by trees, brambles and weeds. They enjoyed it as it was for a while, before starting to create their travel-inspired garden just over five years ago. It has evolved into a series of gardens, designed and planted according to each area's growing conditions, but above all the garden is imbued with creativity and fun. Jo and Andi love to relax in it, both together and with friends. They also open the garden via the National Garden Scheme to raise money for nursing charities, as Jo previously worked for the NHS. To visit, see @groomscottagegarden

What was the garden like when you moved in?

It was very overgrown. There were a lot of mature trees that cast shade over the garden, and being close to the house, they were starting to undermine some of the foundations. In the garden itself, there were mainly brambles and perennial weeds, but with some nicely established shrubs. Mostly, it needed a lot of work.

What have you done to create your garden?

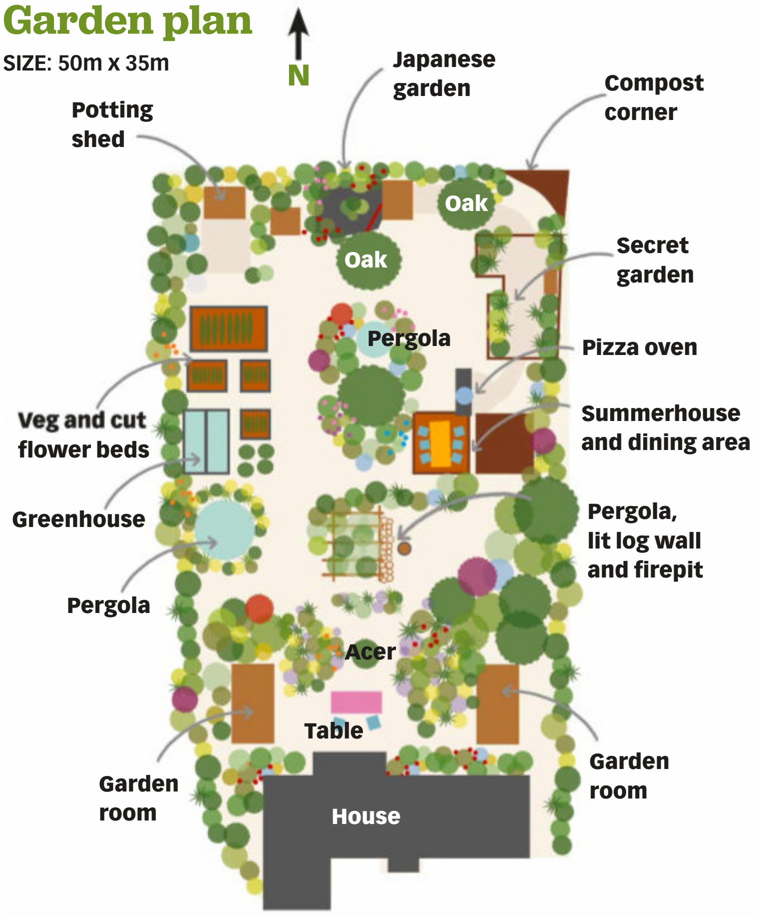
We created a series of gardens within a garden, due to tackling it a bit at a time. The garden was too big and unwieldy to do all at once – it covers about 0.4 acres in total – so we split it into sections. Then we looked at the soil and light conditions in each section – whether sunny, shady, dry or wet – and planted each one to suit.

What was the inspiration for your garden?

It's eclectic – a combination of travel, particularly around Asia, and our love of English gardens through visiting traditional gardens as members of the National Trust. Our travels influenced the creation of our Japanese garden, complete with a torii gate built by Andi, and our secret garden, with its Buddha, water feature, wind chimes, seating and lighting. It feels very serene and quiet, and reminds us of trips away. The traditional English elements come through

Garden plan

SIZE: 50m x 35m



① Vertical planting contributes to the charm, including this wisteria-covered pergola, sheltering an unusual ceramic table and stools

② The lit oak wall acts as a twinkling backdrop to the firepit and outdoor cooking area, and makes a wildlife-friendly divide

③ Hidden behind a pair of reclaimed blue doors, the secret garden is a meditative haven of ferns, hostas and Buddhist sculptures

④ The plot came with several mature oak trees, beneath which Jo and Andi added shade-loving plants and seating

SECRET GARDEN
3

> “This space reflects the owners’ personalities and travels. They love colour, but also embrace shade, planting to the garden’s strengths”

Clive Johnson-Cooper, GOTY 2023 winner, Judges’ and People’s Choice

Gardens of the Year
COMPETITION 2024
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① Evidence of Jo and Andi's travels and love of Asia can be found throughout, including the Japanese-style garden with a handmade torii gate

② Wander past the summerhouse and into the secret garden and you'll find Jo's favourite spot for an evening glass of wine

> *"Jo and Andi have really considered their garden in terms of sustainable materials and planting. It's full of joy, and a lot of work obviously goes into keeping it happy and healthy"*
>
> **Arit Anderson, GOTY judge, garden designer and *Gardeners' World* TV presenter**

in the colourful borders at the front, the roses and the structures to grow climbers on.

Have you had any help along the way, from friends, family or professionals?

We're proud to say that we've done everything ourselves, capitalising on our different skills. We both visualise what we think something should look like, then Andi constructs it. We hate throwing anything out, so you can see recycling and upcycling all round the garden, including paving, raised beds and climbing plant frames. We do a lot of the planting together, with Andi growing whatever he can from seed.

What are the biggest challenges you've faced?

One challenge is the sandy soil, making it difficult to get enough moisture to some plants. We've tackled this by diverting run-off water from some of the buildings to the places that need it most. The other challenge is the established trees, including three oaks, five large silver birches and a lot of smaller trees dotted round. We love them, but they do cast shade, so we had to create shade gardens to go with them. Any trees we add, such as fruit trees, we try to manage their size.

Which elements are you most proud of?

We love the secret garden, created over the past eight months. And the Japanese-style garden, which takes care of itself now. But mainly the layout, which encourages you to walk round and explore. There are little surprises to discover too, once you start wandering down the paths or under the tree canopies, from a log wall and pizza oven to the fruit and vegetable garden.

What is your favourite part of the garden?

For me it's the seat in the secret garden with a nice glass of wine – if Andi wants to find me, that's where I'll be. Andi's favourite spot is in the greenhouse, where he loves growing plants from seed, and tending his tomatoes and vegetables – he's fascinated by how a tiny seed can turn into a huge plant. Plus, it doesn't cost anything.

How do you use the garden on a daily basis?

We don't use the garden, it uses us! It's all-consuming at certain times of the year, such as July, and without nurture it would go wild. When it's finished with us, we sit in it, eat in it and have friends round – it's like an extension of the house. Opening for the National Garden Scheme has been so worthwhile, partly due to my previous employment with the NHS. It's good to give something back and now we're opening it even more, due to popular demand! But most of all, we love gardening – and hopefully that shows.

See all our winning gardens and find out how they were created in *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine* through 2025 – for all six finalists, including our Judges' Choice winner Sara Faulkner, go to **GardenersWorld.com/peoples-choice**

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Gardening is good for you! Six inspiring experts reveal how getting your hands into soil, growing beneficial plants and connecting with nature can transform all aspects of your health.

Gardening offers more than just beautiful blooms and fresh produce – it can also be a powerful tool for improving our wellbeing. Whether it's tending to house plants, digging in the dirt or growing your own food, the act of nurturing plants or simply getting outdoors in nature can help us heal, recharge and find solace.

This can be especially important in winter, when darker days and colder weather can take their toll on physical and mental wellbeing. There are also times in life when you might need a little extra help from nature, from accessing the power of healing herbs or nutritious plants to help combat stress or illness, to finding therapy and togetherness in forest bathing or the collective spirit of community gardening.

In this special feature, we explore the experiences of six gardeners and nature and wellbeing experts who share how gardening has transformed their lives, giving them hope, resilience and a healthier lifestyle. They show how anyone, no matter their circumstances, can benefit from time spent with plants.

Gardening for recovery

Andrew Oldham, garden writer and journalist @lifeonpigrow

My love of growing my own began around the age of 29, when I was involved in a car accident and then had to learn how to walk again. Obviously, when you're learning to walk in your late 20s, it's not as easy as when you're a toddler. I was in a lot of pain and ended up depressed. My consultant recommended that I take up gardening.

I had a tiny front garden that was more like a parking space. My late father was supportive and helped me build a wooden bench on wheels that I could use to move easily around the garden. I started with raised beds and pots, then got into dwarf apples and flowers, especially climbers. I avoided digging because I couldn't, but I used pots for crops such as potatoes, which I harvested by tipping over the pot. The process was slow, but within 18 months people walking by the garden started complimenting it. Gardening became a game of trial and error, learning from mistakes and researching how to do things right.

In early 2023, I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. My doctor gave me a harsh ultimatum: I could either reverse it within six months or eventually lose my feet. I immediately changed my approach to gardening. I had to give away crops high in carbs like potatoes. Instead, I focused on growing foods that are better for managing diabetes, like cut-and-come-again lettuce and greens that grow above ground. Herbs such as oregano, thyme and marjoram are great for adding flavour to food without extra calories. Chillies are another fantastic option.

Gardening also helped me regain my energy, and the more weight I lost, the more I could do in the garden, which became a virtuous cycle. Gardening taught me resilience. It's not about perfection but adapting to what you're given. I've future-proofed my garden by moving my veg patch uphill and creating a more secure area to protect against pests such as rabbits. I've also started sharing my produce with the community. I grow apples, but since I can't eat many of them, I give them away. In looking after my own health I've also created a sense of community and support.

Cut-and-come-again lettuce is easy to grow and will supply nutrients nearly all year

Chili peppers add heat and flavour to dishes without adding calories

> *The process was slow, but within 18 months people walking by the garden started complimenting it*

PHOTOS: ALUN CALLENDER; SARAH CUTTLE; JULIE HOWDEN/WOODLAND TRUST; JASON INGRAM

Gardening for nature connection

Sally Bavin, Conservation Officer, Woodland Trust *@woodlandtrust*

Spending time in woodlands, and natural environments in general, has proven to reduce anxiety and improve mood. Woodlands are particularly powerful because they offer that feeling of separation from everyday life, giving us space to escape and recharge. Phytoncides, natural volatile organic compounds released by plants, are part of the reason why woodlands are so beneficial. When you walk through a woodland, you're inhaling these compounds, which may help regulate the immune system and reduce stress levels.

Learning about the natural world also creates a sense of wonder. When you start to understand the intricate workings of an ecosystem, it enriches your experience of being outdoors. The more you learn, the more you notice. That's a powerful part of the experience of walking in a woodland – it opens your eyes to the world around you in a way that you might not have appreciated before. In January, it may seem like there's not much going on in nature, but there are plenty of things to look out for. Hazel catkins, for instance, start as small, stubby, cigar-shaped buds and then open into yellow, pollen-filled 'lamb's tails' that sway in the wind. You might also spot the bright-pink female flowers of the hazel tree if you look closely at the branches. Song thrushes also begin their mating calls around this time of year, so noticing when they start singing again after the quiet of winter can be a real treat.

I think being in nature, in general, is great for our wellbeing. Even in the middle of a city, if you walk into an urban woodland, you feel like you're being cocooned by nature. It creates a physical barrier between you and the busy outside world – whether it's traffic noise or just the hustle of everyday life. For some people, the enclosed feeling of a woodland may not be comfortable – they might prefer open spaces like beaches – but having a mix of natural environments to enjoy is important.

There's something quite grounding about being in a woodland in winter. It's a time when nature is taking a rest – everything slows down, and you see the decomposing leaf litter on the ground, which is regenerating the soil. This can remind us that we don't always have to be operating at full capacity. There's a natural cycle of rest and regeneration in nature, and that can be a metaphor for our own lives as well. It gives us the opportunity to pause and reflect, knowing that spring is just around the corner.

There is plenty to look out for in woodlands this month, such as the emergence of hazel catkins

The Hoxton Community Garden provides a natural space for inner city Londoners

Community gardening allows people to connect with each other while making the back-breaking job of lifting potatoes easier

PHOTOS: SALLY BAVIN; GETTY/MIKE HARRINGTON, PAUL HAYWARD, SOLSTOCK; STEVE MASON

Gardening for togetherness

Steven Mason, community gardener, Hoxton Community Garden *@hoxton_trust*

Gardening is a way to connect people with the natural world, especially in urban environments where many feel disconnected. It's not just about growing plants, it's also about creating a space where people feel safe, supported and part of something bigger.

For me, the most important thing is encouraging people to step out of the consumer market and back into the natural world. Many people have become very consumer-focused, but I try to encourage them to reconnect with nature. It boosts their wellbeing, teaches them new skills, and helps them feel empowered.

The garden is a calming, welcoming environment, and many people have told me how much it helps them feel better. We've had people who are extremely shy or struggling with mental health come to the garden and slowly open up over time. It's amazing to see the transformation – people who were once withdrawn and quiet become more relaxed, chatty and engaged. They say it's the garden that makes them feel safe and helps them let go of their worries.

One example that comes to mind is a man who came to the garden with a carer. He was very shy and didn't speak at all for the first few visits. But over time, he started talking, and by the end, he was interacting normally with everyone. His carer said the garden had completely changed him. That's what the garden does – it allows people to be themselves and feel supported.

Gardening is also a fantastic way to bring people together, especially those who might not have many opportunities to interact with others. We see it all the time in the garden, where people who start out volunteering for the first time often come back regularly because they enjoy the sense of community. It's a non-religious, non-political space where people can connect with each other and with nature, which is really powerful.

The garden also gives people the confidence to take what they've learned and share it with their families and communities. It's a cycle – people come to the garden, gain skills and confidence, and then take that energy back to their homes and neighbourhoods. It's a ripple effect that improves everyone's wellbeing.

Community gardens are more important than ever, especially in urban environments where people often feel disconnected from nature. These spaces help improve mental and physical health, build a sense of community, and even combat climate change by creating green corridors and planting trees. It's a win-win for everyone.

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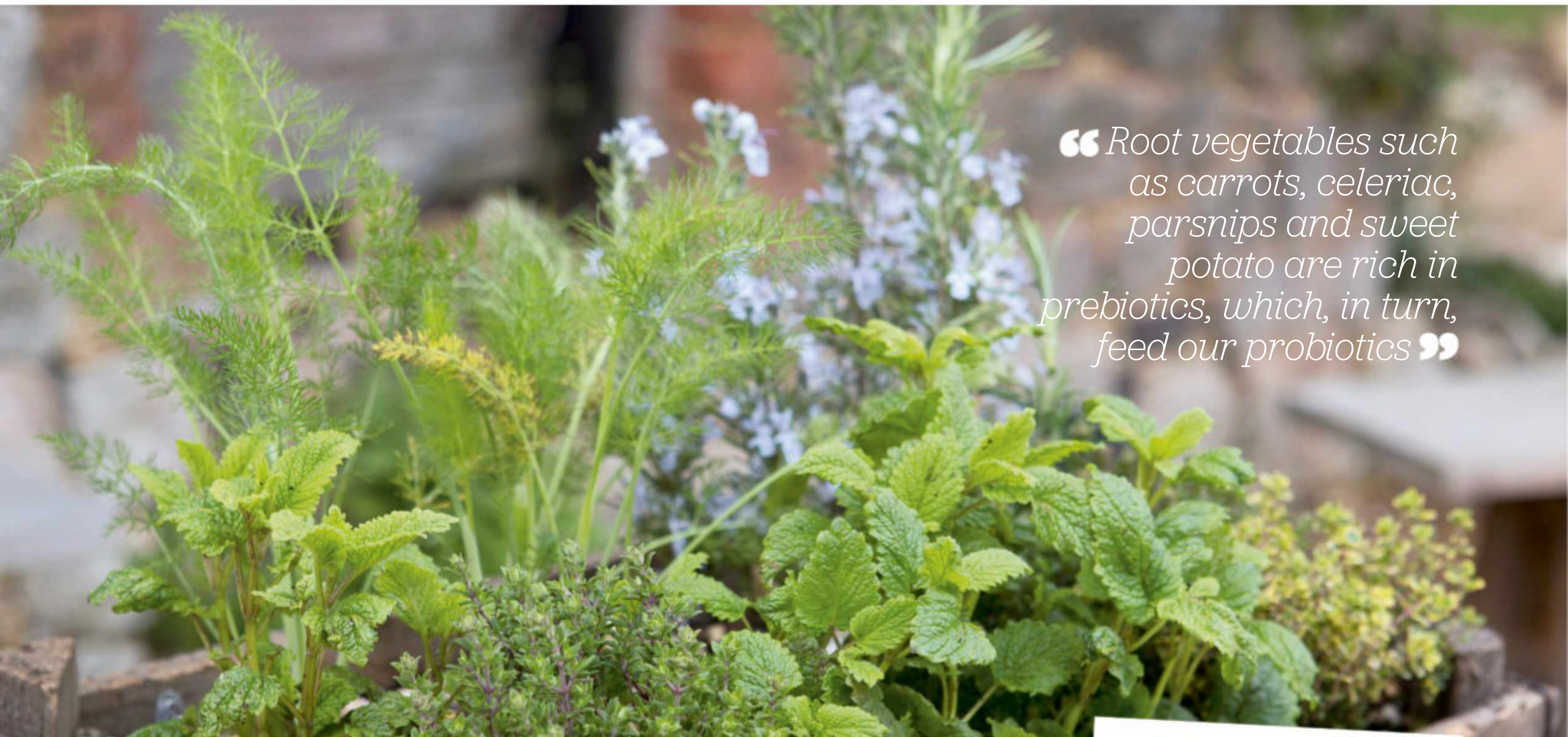


Boxes and windowsills are invaluable places for people without gardens to grow tasty and beneficial herbs

> “Root vegetables such as carrots, celeriac, parsnips and sweet potato are rich in prebiotics, which, in turn, feed our probiotics”

A homemade garlic honey remedy for treating coughs and colds

Gardening for boosting immunity

Jo Dunbar, medical herbalist

botanicamedica.co.uk

In the early days of winter, up until Christmas, I always think that we still have the resources from the summer sunshine, which supports our immunity, however, in the later months of winter – January, February and March – our resources are starting to run low, we feel weaker and the cold really draws on our energy. Our immune systems are working hard to keep us healthy and many suffer from seasonal affective disorder.

So, what can we do? Well, we all know that the leaves of plants absorb the sun and convert that sunlight into a range of chemicals specific to that plant. In the summer and autumn, we can harvest plants such as herbs and preserve them as tinctures, honeys or oils. Then in winter, we can imbibe those solutions with their amazing healing biochemicals into our body to support our health and help keep us well until spring, when the sun is stronger.

Even if you don’t have a garden, you can grow herbs in a pot. Lemon balm, for example, grows very well on a sunny windowsill. I used this herb a lot during the Covid-19 pandemic because it has a calming effect on the nerves while lifting the spirits, and is an excellent antiviral herb. This plant can be used as a herbal tea, and you can treat it as you would a salad crop, as a cut-and-come-again herb. Rosemary is another herb that can easily be grown on a sunny windowsill and is excellent for mental focus or lifting your mood – it is even thought to help stimulate hair growth. Thyme is useful as a natural antibiotic against chest infections, as well as urinary tract infections. Beautiful sage is not only a very good antibacterial especially for sore throats, but it also supports cognition, especially for those with menopause brain fog.

Simple home remedies like fermented garlic honey are great to help combat coughs and colds, and will keep on a cool shelf for up to 12 months. To make, place a whole bulb of garlic, cloves peeled and separated, in a sterilised, airtight jar and cover with raw honey. Turn the mixture for about three days or until the garlic cloves sink to the bottom, opening once a day to ‘burp’ any built-up gas. There is a very small risk of botulism, but the naturally acidic nature of honey will prevent spores growing. Never give raw honey to babies under 1 year.

It’s also good to think a bit more broadly about our foods, because food is a medicine as well. Root vegetables such as carrots, celeriac, parsnips and sweet potato are rich in prebiotics, which, in turn, feed our probiotics – our friendly gut bacteria. These bacteria positively influence our immune system. If our immune system goes awry, we become vulnerable to viruses and bacteria, so we must make sure that we support it.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/LIUDMILA CHERNETSKA; LEAPING COW/CRIS BLACK

> *By reclaiming her connection with nature, one of my students was able to reconnect with her identity and gain a renewed sense of purpose in life*

A short stroll around your local park can reveal the bounties that nature offers

Using bushcraft skills helps Beth connect with her Zimbabwean roots

Gardening for personal growth

Beth Collier, nature-allied psychotherapist

@wildinthecityuk

When I think about the ideal, most positive way that nature can make many of us feel, it's a place that gives a sense of being rejuvenated, uplifted, calmer and more relaxed. It calms rumination, and triggers areas of the brain associated with love and empathy. In psychotherapeutic terms, these qualities replicate the core conditions of an ideal caregiver. Understanding how nature can support our emotional health and wellbeing is something that you can carry with you indefinitely. I feel fortunate and privileged to have grown up on a smallholding in rural Suffolk. Nature was both a playground and a source of comfort and joy. I realised at an early age how lucky I was to have that access, especially compared with children who might have lived in tower blocks with no such sanctuary.

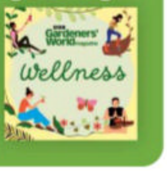
But even in cities, there are opportunities to connect with nature in meaningful ways. While access to green spaces can be limited, even small patches of grass with dandelions can provide important connections and metaphors for clients. Nature offers an opportunity to regain a sense of identity and belonging, and it can be a powerful tool for personal growth and healing.

One of my students recently realised that, in pushing away her national identity, she had also pushed away nature because it was so embedded in her upbringing. By reclaiming her connection with the natural world, she was able to reconnect with her identity and gain a renewed sense of purpose in life. This type of journey, where nature helps someone reclaim or rediscover aspects of themselves, is incredibly powerful.

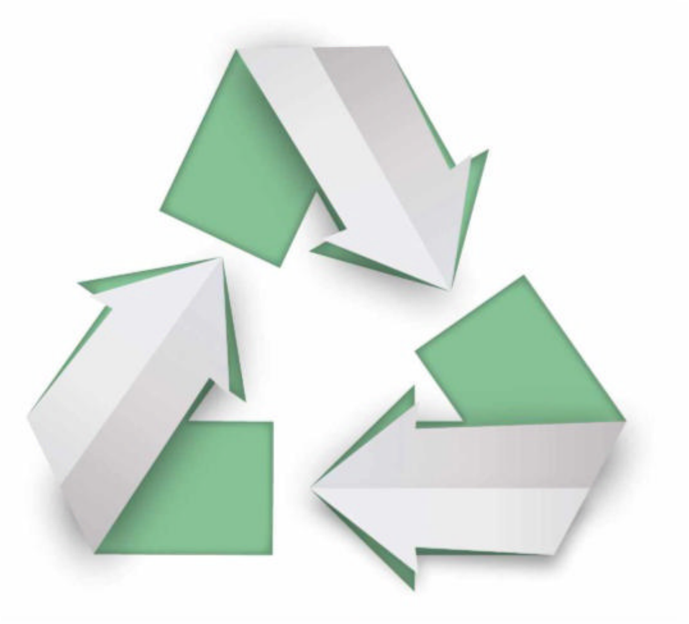
I've also found that bushcraft – learning to live in harmony with nature – connects me to my Zimbabwean roots and ancestral traditions. This connection has inspired me to create spaces where other people of colour – who feel excluded from nature because of societal attitudes – can reconnect with nature and overcome the barriers that often make them feel unwelcome in outdoor settings.

Even urban areas have places where city-dwellers can appreciate nature

Listen to the GW Wellness podcast series with guests including Monty Don, for more on how nature and gardening can improve wellbeing. **GardenersWorld.com/podcast** *Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2 January 2025*



PHOTOS: BETH COLLIER; WILD IN THE CITY; NICOLE WORRICA; SUZANNE WORRICA



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Desert Botanical Garden, Phoenix

Garden globetrotting

Fancy a new look for your plot or just want to try something different? Our new series about gardens around the world could be just the ticket. This month, **Matt Collins** reveals what captured his heart in Arizona

Matt Collins is a garden, landscape and travel writer, and Head Gardener at the Garden Museum in London @museum_gardener

Despite years of transatlantic travel, immersion in the beautiful and botanically diverse landscapes of the American Southwest had long eluded me. Evermore curious to experience the arid homeland of some of the gardening world's toughest and most dynamic flora, I finally made a trip in spring and fell head over heels for the 'Grand Canyon state'.

Arizona paints a very particular image in the mind: of wide-open Route 66 and the magnificent Canyonlands, and of the Sonoran Desert stretching off into the Mexican sunset. But as the fifth largest of the contiguous United States, preparing an itinerary can feel daunting. Arriving at Phoenix's international airport, you face the question of whether to head north to the dramatic sculptural landforms that Arizona is famed for – the Grand Canyon, Horseshoe Bend, the buttes of Sedona – and the great forests of orange-tinted ponderosa pine, or south towards the iconic saguaro cacti, whose desert rangelands are, for the plant-hungry gardener, every bit as captivating as the Canyon. In the end, I just had to do both.

Fortunately for those with limited time, Arizona's floral diversity is thrillingly encapsulated in one prime central location: Scottsdale's Desert Botanical Garden (DBG). Situated just outside Phoenix, this is, undoubtedly, where any Southwestern horticultural odyssey ought to begin. Founded

PHOTOS: GETTY/ERIC MISCHKE; EVA NEMETH

Cholla and saguaro cacti silhouetted against the setting sun form the quintessential Arizonan skyline

in 1939 as a preserve for vulnerable desert plant life, the garden's whopping 140 acres tell the story of desert adaptation through an abundance of bristles and blooms. In early-March sunshine, I found myself meandering among ornate displays of native salvias, agaves, scarlet hesperaloes and bright poppies, getting acquainted with the region's weather-worn characters: curious cholla, ocotillo and pipe-organ cacti, architectural mesquite trees and the pink-blushed fairy duster (*Calliandra eriophylla*), as well as the majestic saguaro, with its fluted columnar trunk and muscular arms every bit the cartoon image. Meanwhile, Scottsdale itself made for a cheerful base. A suburb of Phoenix, yet a trendy little city in its own right, I enjoyed the quintessential Southwestern cuisine and saloon bars of glitzy Old Town, and the city's wealth of scenic hiking trails.

As mainland America's youngest state, Arizona remains among its wildest, and so following a botanical initiation at DBG, I recommend taking the road south to the vibrant city of Tucson to immerse in the saguaro's natural stomping ground. Here, you're in easy reach of spectacular yet accessible Sonoran landscapes: the rugged state parks of Catalina and Picacho Peak, and the mind-blowingly expansive Saguaro National Park. My evenings in Tucson, spent walking among 150-year-old cacti lit by a reddening desert sun, were unforgettable.

■ ESSENTIAL INFO

Between October and April, Desert Botanical Garden opens Monday-Wednesday 8am-8pm and Thursday-Sunday 8am-9pm; entry $24.95-$32.95. ***dbg.org***, ***visitarizona.com***

Bring the look home

Give your garden an Arizonan twist by adopting its plants, ethos and style

DESERT STARS TO SUIT

There is a surprising number of hardy Arizonan natives that translate to British gardens, albeit requiring a good measure of sunshine and drainage.

A London friend grows saguaros in his back garden by sitting them on gritty soil – rather than digging a hole – and placing stabilising rocks around the trunk. But for me, the Arizonan stand-outs are the succulent *Agave americana*, the many bountiful cultivars of the bushy *Salvia* x *jamensis* (particularly the cream-coloured 'Melen') and, my personal garden favourite, the coral-toned globe mallow, *Sphaeralcea* 'Childerley'. All can be tender here, so take suitable precautions in winter.

In the UK, *Agave americana* will survive outdoors in warmer regions

Californian poppies and lupins provide eye-catching splashes of colour in arid spots

SUMMER TIMETABLE

How I love the gardening hours practiced in warmer climes. During the summer months, Arizonans often garden in the early mornings and late afternoons, when the glare of the sun dulls and the heat abates, and therefore they experience gardens in their best, most comfortable light.

If not throughout the year, in summer Brits could certainly benefit from switching to 'Arizonan hours'; perhaps even enjoying a midday nap in the shade…

Dusk and dawn are ideal times for summer gardening

KEEP IT BASIC

Space and simplicity are key components of American Southwestern planting design: repeated feature plants should be mulched with gravel and given room to breathe. But desert flora is more dynamic than static evergreens. Autumn and winter rainfall can trigger ephemeral flourishes of spectacular annuals, with blue lupins, orange poppies and white chicory bursting from bare earth. So consider sowing or planting plugs of *Eschscholzia* 'Sun Shades' for a transitory flush of seasonal exuberance.

PHOTOS: ALAMY/R ANN KAUTZKY; GETTY/FARAJ HAMDAN, THOMAS ROCHE

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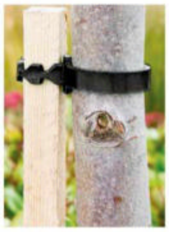

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Choose a position near a doorway or window, so your container can be easily admired

Potting on a winter show

PART 2

Nick Bailey banishes January blues with a sophisticated container display that's guaranteed to lift the spirits

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH

After the frantic festivities, many of us will be feeling a bit down in the doldrums at this time of year, so reignite seasonal joy by creating an elegant container display.

Reflecting the spirit of January, this pot recipe is icy cold in terms of colour, but positively bursting with new life.

Based around a pale-blue pot, this scheme sticks to a limited palette of blues, greys, greens and white, all finished off with a cushion-like topping of moss. This container will bloom through January and February, making it perfect for perking up a winter patio.

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Inspired by the ice chill of January, this container makes use of cool-coloured blue and grey foliage plants to show off the pure-white blooms at the front of the display. Ideal for cheering up a dark corner or creating a focal point on a patio, this container will perform for many months. But when it does go over, the conifer and lavender can be moved to permanent homes in the garden, while the hellebore and snowdrops could be transferred to a smaller container and tucked away, ready for display next winter.

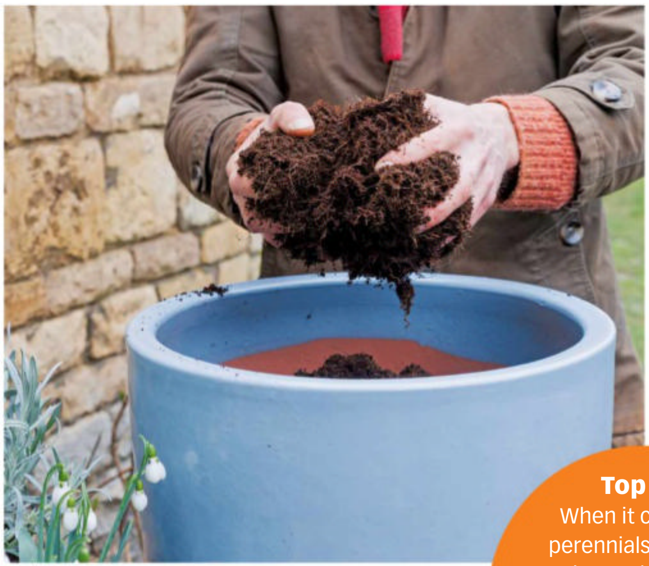
There are many snowdrops to choose from, but I've opted for the large-flowered species *Galanthus elwesii* for drama. The remaining members of the display comprise *Helleborus niger* 'Potter's Wheel', lavender 'Silver Mist' and *Juniperus* 'Blue Arrow'. This conifer is key to the display as it links to the pale blue of the pot, while its dusty notes make a nod to the lavender, and show off the shimmering white of the snowdrops and hellebore. Position the pot so it receives morning or evening light to really help it shine.

You will need

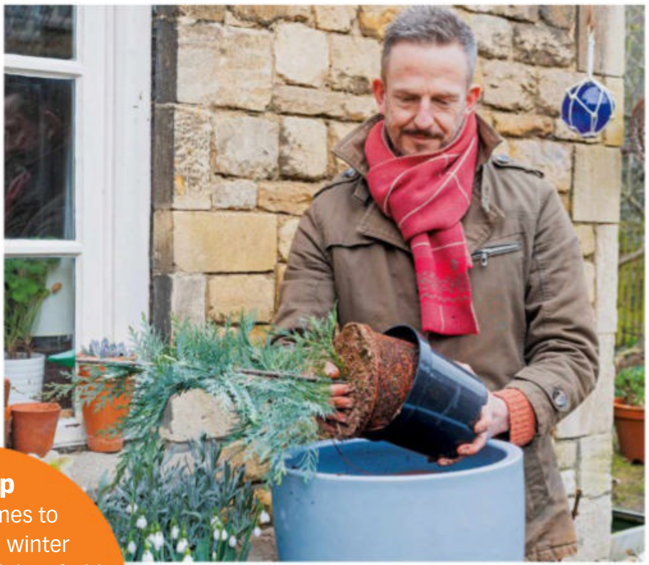
- ***Galanthus elwesii*** **x 5**
- ***Helleborus niger*** **'Potter's Wheel' x 1**
- ***Juniperus*** **'Blue Arrow' x 1**
- ***Lavandula angustifolia*** **'Silver Mist' x 2**

Create your container display

Water your plants thoroughly, then follow Nick's easy steps to pot up your winter display

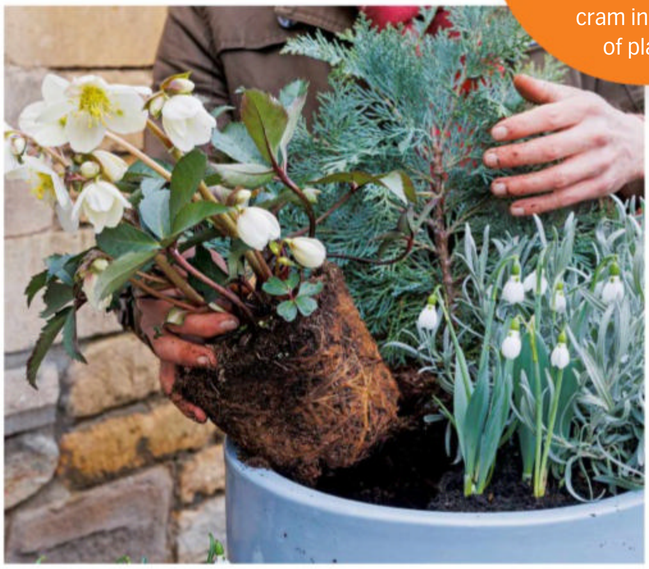


1 **Fill** two thirds of the pot with peat-free compost, and add a little garden soil to aid water retention and nutrition.

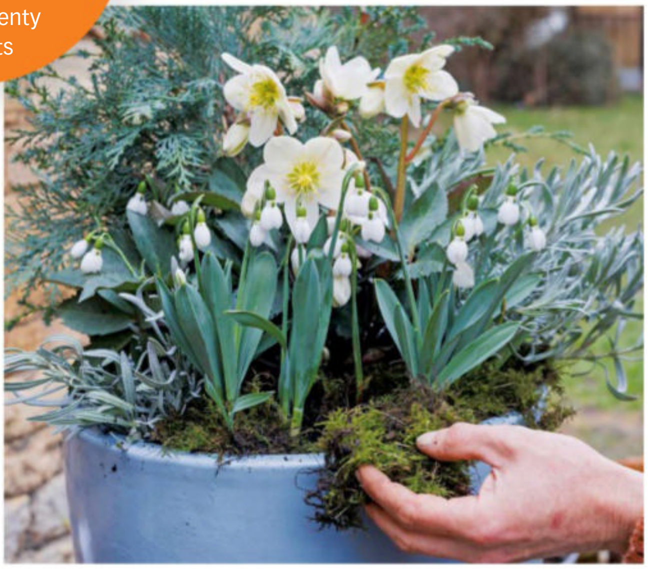


2 **Site** the lavender and conifer to the back and sides of the pot, settling them into the compost. Together they form the backdrop to the pot.

Top tip
When it comes to perennials in winter containers, don't be afraid to strip a little compost from the roots before planting so you can cram in plenty of plants



3 **Position** the snowdrops and hellebore to the front of the container, taking out excess compost from the plants as you go, to ensure that all the plants fit in a limited root zone.



4 **Finish** off the pot with a top layer of moss. This can be gathered from your garden or purchased, but ensure every speck of compost is covered so you create a cohesive look.

Compost maintenance

The growing medium in pots needs attention to work well for the support of your plants. Follow Nick's tips to get the best out of it

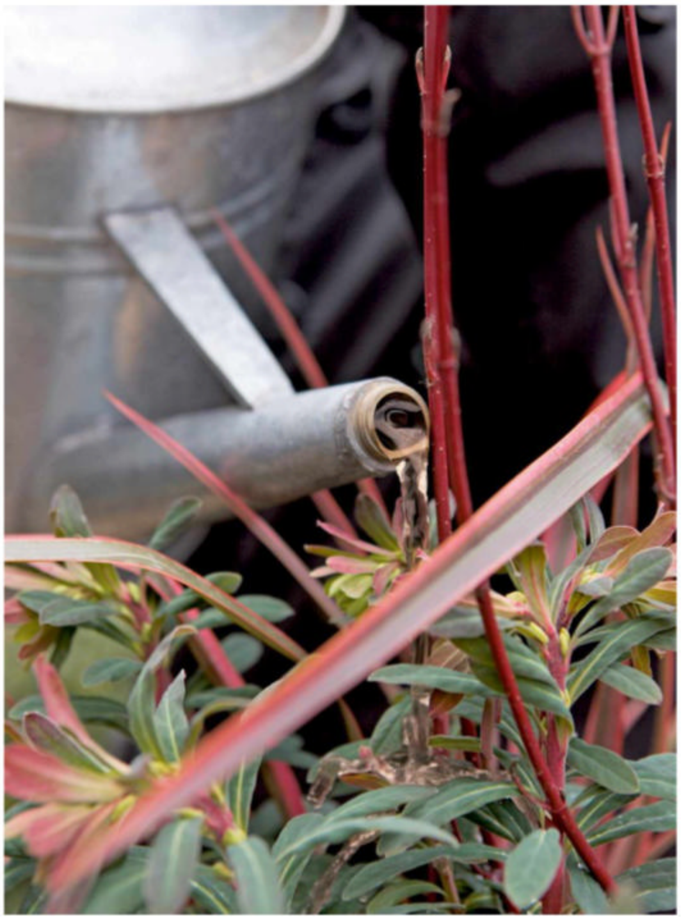
Containerised compost behaves quite differently to the soil beneath your feet. This growing medium often carries fewer beneficial critters, less nutrition and is more prone to compaction than garden soil. Mitigating these issues is, however, easy to do. Adding some garden soil to your pot compost will bring in useful organisms that can keep the substrate healthy. And when it comes to nutrition, regular liquid feeds during the growing season will support plants in rapid growth, whereas slow-release granules added in autumn or winter gradually supply nutrients to keep slower-growing plants happy.

Soil compaction in pots can be addressed in a number of ways. Adding a mulch of organic matter, such as garden compost, mushroom compost or well rotted manure to the surface will prevent rain splattering in, which will cause sedimentation and compaction of the soil surface. A mulch also has the added benefit of providing a degree of insulation to the soil in the container and, therefore, the plant's roots.

I like to open up the soil surface in pots with a hand fork after a few months to ensure good water, nutrient and air penetration. Containerised compost can also become worn out, so regular top-ups of fresh compost as the medium in the container slumps will help keep plants healthy and provide fresh material for them to root into.

> *“Regular liquid feeds will support plants in rapid growth, whereas slow-release granules gradually supply nutrients to keep slower-growing plants happy”*

Use fresh good-quality, peat-free compost to get your potted plants off to a good start



ABOVE Liquid feed is ideal for when plants need quick-release nutrients and is best used during the spring and summer
LEFT Measure out the right amount of slow-release fertiliser

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

NEXT MONTH A pittosporum and a heuchera are the stars of Nick's February container

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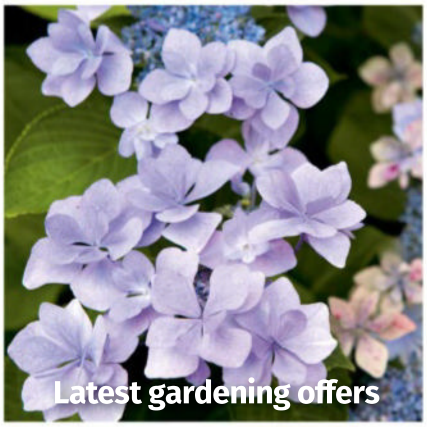

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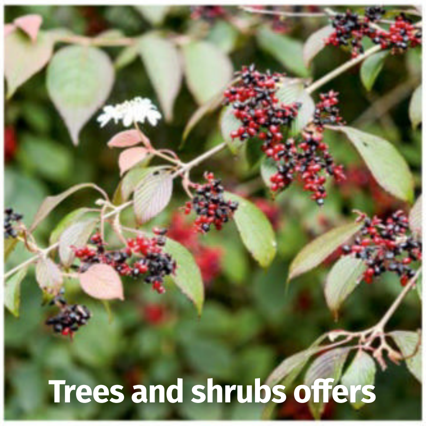

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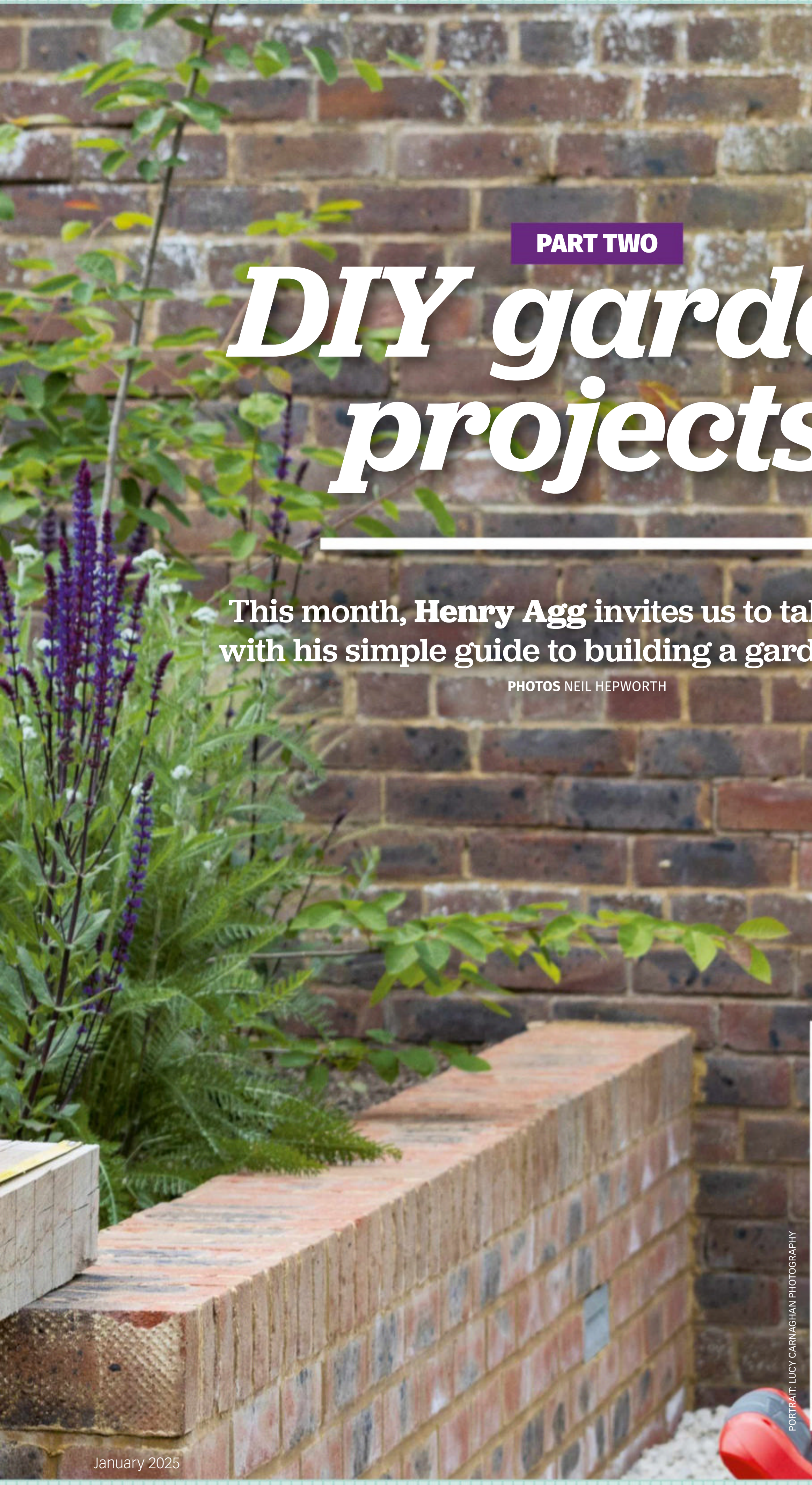


PART TWO

DIY garden projects

This month, **Henry Agg** invites us to take a seat, with his simple guide to building a garden bench

PHOTOS NEIL HEPWORTH

PORTRAIT: LUCY CARNAGHAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Henry Agg is a professional landscape designer based in the South East. With training from the RHS and The English Gardening School, he advocates for gardening's restorative benefits on mental wellbeing. ***@henryagg***

How to build a railway-sleeper bench

No garden is truly complete without a comfortable place to sit and admire all of your hard work. Garden seating comes in all shapes and sizes, but a railway-sleeper bench is a classic option that suits most garden styles. It is rustic, solid, and surprisingly simple to build. And by making one yourself, it will be the perfect size for your garden and save you money, too. Read on as I show you how to create your very own garden bench, made from heavy-duty oak railway sleepers, that's sure to last for years.

You will need

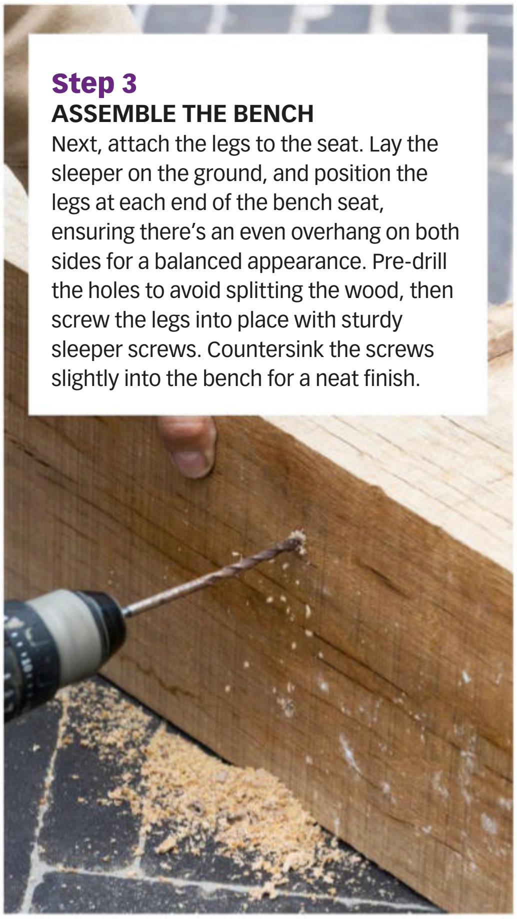
- ✔ ***Post-hole digger***
- ✔ ***Hardwood or softwood sleepers***
- ✔ ***Tape measure***
- ✔ ***Chop saw or hand saw***
- ✔ ***Drill***
- ✔ ***Sleeper screws***
- ✔ ***Postcrete***
- ✔ ***Spirit level***
- ✔ ***Watering can***
- ✔ ***Wood filler***
- ✔ ***Sandpaper***
- ✔ ***Wood varnish***

■ **Total cost: £110**

■ **Time taken: 2-3 hours**

Step 1
MARK OUT YOUR BENCH LOCATION

Begin by choosing the perfect spot. Consider views of the garden, sunlight and shade. It's critical to determine the overall width of your bench before you start digging as this will dictate where you place the holes for the legs. Using a post-hole digger, dig two holes for the legs, each 60cm deep.



Step 3
ASSEMBLE THE BENCH

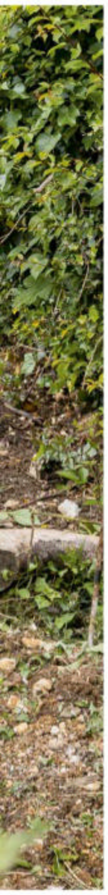
Next, attach the legs to the seat. Lay the sleeper on the ground, and position the legs at each end of the bench seat, ensuring there's an even overhang on both sides for a balanced appearance. Pre-drill the holes to avoid splitting the wood, then screw the legs into place with sturdy sleeper screws. Countersink the screws slightly into the bench for a neat finish.

Step 4
POSITION THE BENCH

With the bench assembled, it's time to move it into position. Ask someone to help you lift the bench and carefully place the legs into the holes you dug earlier. Make sure the bench is stable and sitting at the height you want it before moving to the next step.

Step 5
CONCRETE THE LEGS

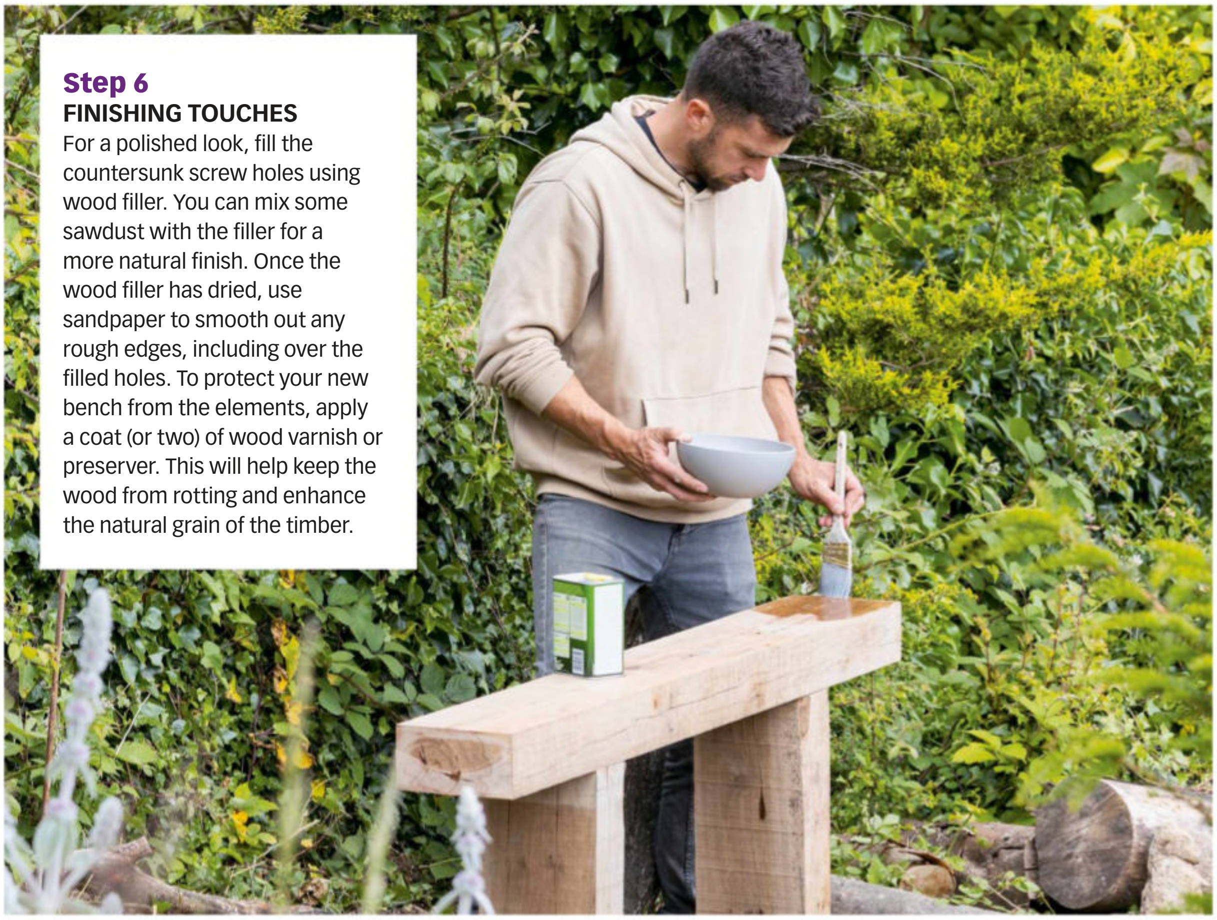
Fill the leg holes halfway with Postcrete. Use a spirit level to ensure your bench is level, both vertically and horizontally. Pour water into the holes using a watering can, and hold the bench in position for 2-3 minutes until the Postcrete begins to set. Once sturdy, fill the rest of the hole with Postcrete, topping it up with water until it spills over slightly. Leave to set firmly for 20 minutes.



Step 2

CUT THE SLEEPERS TO SIZE

Now it's time to prepare the sleepers. First, measure and cut the legs to a comfortable height for sitting. A general rule is 45-50cm from the ground, but remember to take the thickness of the seat – the depth of the sleeper – into account. A chop saw will be your best friend for this stage. You can hire these from most tool-rental shops.



Step 6

FINISHING TOUCHES

For a polished look, fill the countersunk screw holes using wood filler. You can mix some sawdust with the filler for a more natural finish. Once the wood filler has dried, use sandpaper to smooth out any rough edges, including over the filled holes. To protect your new bench from the elements, apply a coat (or two) of wood varnish or preserver. This will help keep the wood from rotting and enhance the natural grain of the timber.

Other bench ideas to try

▶ Floating bench

If you're looking to save space or make use of vertical features in your garden, a floating bench could be the perfect solution. A floating bench is a contemporary option and it's also a great way to maximise the use of your garden walls. Installing a floating bench might seem a complicated task, but it's actually quite straightforward. You can find pre-made floating bench kits, but this is definitely a project you can take on yourself by following these instructions.

To build a floating bench:

- Start by selecting strong wall brackets and screws.
- Choose a sturdy material for the bench surface, such as timber or composite decking.
- Secure the brackets to a solid wall or fence, ensuring they're level, then attach your bench surface.

◀ Log bench

For a rustic, natural look that blends into any garden, a log bench is an excellent choice. Best of all, it's incredibly simple to build and can even be completely cost-free. Local tree surgeons often have large logs or tree stems they're trying to dispose of, so it's worth reaching out to see if you can source a log for your bench.

To build a log bench, there are two options:

- Option 1 – Follow a similar process to the railway sleeper bench by attaching log legs and concreting them into the ground. This ensures a solid, stable bench that can withstand the elements.
- Option 2 – For an even simpler approach, find a large log and place it on a slightly raised base for a comfortable sitting height. This requires no digging or concreting and keeps the design minimal and easy to execute.

This type of bench offers a charming, organic feel that's perfect for anyone wanting to create a natural, unrefined seating area.

▶ Pallet sofa

If you're after another budget-friendly option that still looks great, a pallet sofa is the way to go. Pallets are easy to come by, often left outside homes or businesses for anyone to collect. They're a versatile resource that can be repurposed to create all kinds of furniture and garden features.

To build a pallet sofa:

- Pile two pallets, one on top of the other, on a flat surface to create a wide seating area.
- Test to check the pile has reached the desired seating height. Secure the pallets together by screwing through the thickest parts.
- To create the back rest, stand another pallet vertically behind the sofa base, then fix it firmly in place by screwing it to the other two pallets.

Once your pallet sofa is assembled, jazz it up with some comfortable cushions and a throw. The cushions will not only make the sofa more inviting, but also add a pop of colour and texture to your garden.

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/SVEHLIK

NEXT MONTH Henry shows you how to create a stylish and useful water feature to capture rainwater

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GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mapperton House and Gardens**
- **Mappercombe Manor**
- **Batcombe House Gardens**
- **The Newt**
- **Careys Secret Garden**
- **Sculpture by the Lakes**
- **Abbotsbury**
- **Forde Abbey**

David Hurrion

This *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine* Exclusive Tour of Dorset and Somerset is designed to give you a full taste of the West Country's garden life. These counties are rich in beautiful countryside, picturesque towns and villages, and a plethora of superb gardens offering a variety of styles.

Discover the subtropical gardens at Abbotsbury and the formal Italianate gardens at Mapperton, explore private gardens reflecting past and present owners' tastes, and a walled garden project on the Isle of Purbeck.

With guided tours and some inspiring talks from head gardeners, mixed with free visits for independent exploring, this tour with expert plantsman David Hurrion is not to be missed.

DAY 1 Check in independently to the hotel. Welcome drink, introductory talk by **David Hurrion** and group dinner.

DAY 2 Mapperton House and Gardens and **Mappercombe Manor**. The first tour takes us to **Mapperton House and Gardens**, home to the Earl and Countess of Sandwich. There will be time to visit this fine manor house as well as a guided tour of the gardens, which are known for their romantic setting, varied planting

To discuss further details of the tour or to book your place, please call

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Batcombe House

The Newt

Abbotsbury

and views of the Dorset hills. Free time for lunch (not included) then a drive to **Mappercombe Manor**, dating from the 17th century and originally a monks' rest house. Follow the ancient monastic route at the south-facing garden set over four levels, and enjoy surrounding views and well planted borders.

■ **DAY 3 Batcombe House Gardens** and **The Newt.** In the morning, we visit **Batcombe House** for a guided tour with David Hurrion. From here, the coach will travel to the renowned **Newt**, a fabulous Georgian estate with a luxurious hotel and exquisite grounds and gardens, both decorative and functional in providing vegetables for the hotel's restaurant and garden café. We have time for lunch (own expense) before visiting the gardens.

■ **DAY 4 Careys Secret Garden** and **Sculpture by the Lakes**. Today we visit Dorset's Isle of Purbeck, and **Careys Secret Garden** – a project to restore a neglected walled garden, left wild for over 40 years. We explore the recent planting of edible hedgerows, fruit trees, roses, flowers and a vegetable and herb garden. The garden also features seven full-size pieces of the Berlin Wall. In the afternoon, we head to **Sculpture by the Lakes**. Set around former fishing lakes, this botanic garden boasts a Kitchen Garden, an important collection of threatened conifers from around the world, and over 120 sculptures. We have time to enjoy the art and landscape while we explore the garden.

■ **DAY 5 Abbotsbury** and **Forde Abbey**. Morning visit to **Abbotsbury** subtropical gardens, with 30 acres and over 6,000 species of plants from across the world. Voted Historic Houses Association/Christie's Garden of the Year in 2012, the gardens command a wonderful view of the Jurassic Coast at the top of the Magnolia Walk. After free time for lunch (not included) we visit **Forde Abbey**, a 900-year-old house with stunning tapestries and a rich history. Explore the award-winning gardens, which incorporate both formal and informal aspects of garden design, with a spiral garden, woodland, long borders and arboretum. We return to the hotel around 5pm.

NOTE: This tour has been graded as moderate, involving a large amount of walking, with little or no access to assistance. Please bear this in mind when booking.

Sculpture by the Lakes

YOUR ACCOMMODATION

■ Sitting at the heart of Blandford Forum, **The Crown Hotel** immerses you in centuries of history, as well as the modern-day comforts. The hotel is a winning choice for locals and visitors alike, thanks to characterful spaces, fine food and warm hospitality.

DAVID HURRION PORTRAIT: JASON INGRAM

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ABTA
ABTA No.V3120

Our house plant picks

Looking for your next favourite house plant? We share 15 top picks from the team, plus how to care for them

Adam Duxbury, Commissioning Editor

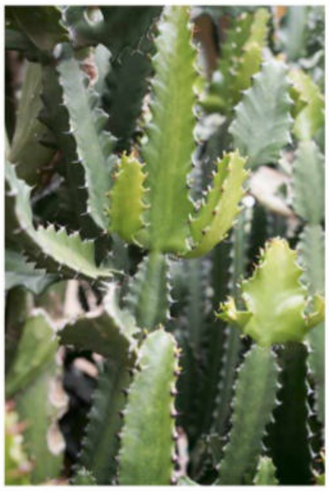
Lipstick plant (*Aeschynanthus*)

What I love most about this plant is how there seems to be flowers on it almost all year round. The flashes of crimson between the dark-green, waxy leaves always cheers me up. It loves a bright, humid spot – a bathroom is ideal – that replicates it's native environment of the jungles of south-east Asia. In the rainforest, it grows as an epiphyte, clinging to tree branches and soaking up air moisture.

TOP TIP
Rainwater is ambrosia for house plants. Although most will do fine with tap water, use rain water (including putting them outside during a downpour on warm days) and they might just go from fine to fab.

String of hearts (*Ceropegia woodii*)

I think string of hearts was the first house plant I ever bought. I was so proud when my first one grew long and lovely, and then less proud as it got increasingly straggly and sad! I've since had more luck by keeping it trimmed and planting propagated cuttings back in around the base to keep it looking full. With the right conditions, you might even be treated to little pink tubular flowers.

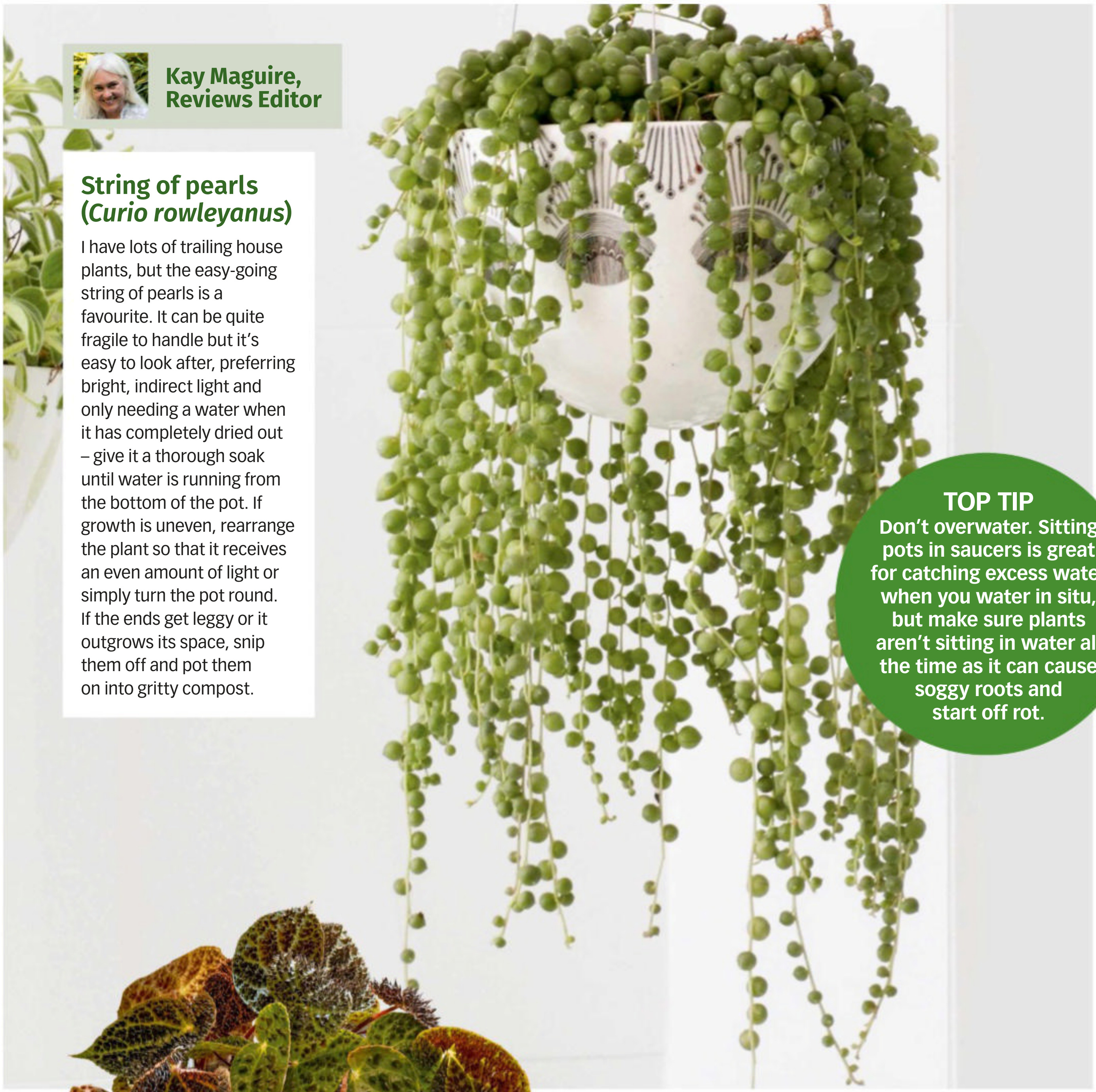


Candelabra tree (*Euphorbia ingens*)

Does it get any easier than euphorbias? These enjoy a bright location, and range from small to huge. My latest is a lovely green-grey 'Variegata'. Even though they look like cacti they are actually from the spurge family, but just like most cacti they need little care, a few low-nitrogen feeds during summer and a watering when the soil is almost bone-dry – I don't water mine at all from November to March.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/TOM_COULTAS, IPUNG RAHMAWAN; JASON INGRAM

Kay Maguire, Reviews Editor

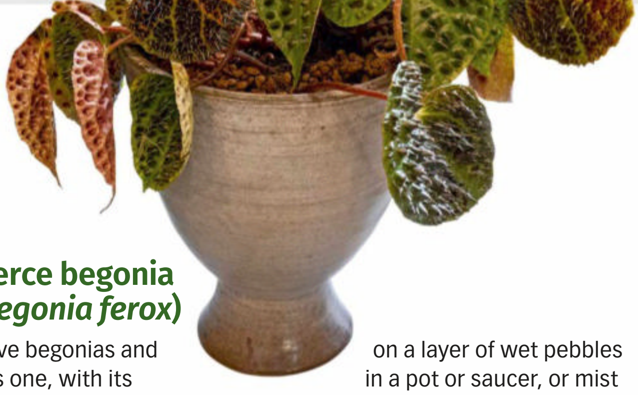


String of pearls (*Curio rowleyanus*)

I have lots of trailing house plants, but the easy-going string of pearls is a favourite. It can be quite fragile to handle but it's easy to look after, preferring bright, indirect light and only needing a water when it has completely dried out – give it a thorough soak until water is running from the bottom of the pot. If growth is uneven, rearrange the plant so that it receives an even amount of light or simply turn the pot round. If the ends get leggy or it outgrows its space, snip them off and pot them on into gritty compost.

TOP TIP

Don't overwater. Sitting pots in saucers is great for catching excess water when you water in situ, but make sure plants aren't sitting in water all the time as it can cause soggy roots and start off rot.

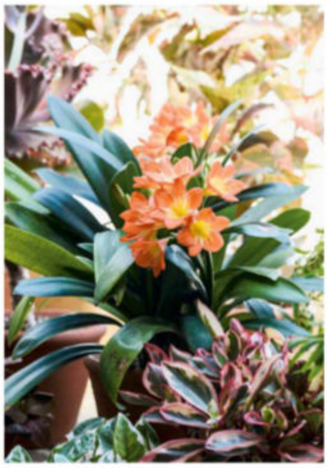


Fierce begonia (*Begonia ferox*)

I love begonias and this one, with its black, spiked leaves, and pink stems and young leaves, makes a great centrepiece for a coffee or dining table. It loves a warm, humid spot in bright, indirect sun, so either keep it on a layer of wet pebbles in a pot or saucer, or mist it regularly. Like most begonias, it can be a bit tricky to water. Only water when the top surface of the soil feels dry and much less in winter, when temperatures are cooler.

Natal lily (*Clivia miniata*)

Hugely rewarding with minimal effort, clivia is a spectacular clump of dark, glossy leaves for most of the year. It likes a cool, bright spot out of direct sun, and needs just a weekly water through summer and nothing at all over winter. It hates being repotted, preferring compacted roots to encourage flowering. It can be moved to a sheltered spot outside in summer. Get all of this right and in spring great spikes of bright-orange flowers will pop up, with up to ten blooms on each sturdy stem.



Catherine Mansley, Digital Editor

Golden pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*)

This is a great first plant for someone who's new to growing house plants. It can cope with lots of neglect and drying out, making it very hard to kill. And it will grow in low light, so is perfect for brightening up shady corners, with its vibrantly variegated leaves. It also grows gratifyingly quickly, so you get a lovely large, lush plant in very little time.

TOP TIP

To water your house plants, remove them from their outer pot and water them in the sink. Let the excess water drain away then put them back in their outer pot to avoid the plants sitting in stagnant water.

Parlour palm (*Chamaedorea elegans*)

The parlour palm earned its name because it tolerated growing in the dim, sooty parlours of wealthy Victorians. This easy-going habit makes it an easy plant to care for, as it's not too fussy about light or humidity levels. Unfortunately, later claims that it will purify the air have proved exaggerated. It's widely and inexpensively available, so you can pick up a large plant relatively cheaply, so it's good choice for making a statement on a budget.

Chain cactus (*Rhipsalis paradoxa*)

If you're looking for a cactus that doesn't need high light levels, the chain cactus is the answer. It hails from tropical forests, where it is shaded by the tree canopy above, so it grows best in bright but indirect light, and needs watering only infrequently, keeping it just moist in winter. Mist daily with soft water. Its delicate string-like fronds hang down gracefully, so it's perfect for growing in hanging baskets or trailing over the edge of a shelf – mine is on a mantelpiece.

PHOTOS: TORIE CHUGG; SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/THOMAS FAULL; JASON INGRAM

Emma Crawforth, Horticultural Editor

Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*)

The plant snob in me seeks out the Spider Group hippeastrums such as *H.* 'Quito' (striped red and white petals) or *H* 'Evergreen' (white and green petals emerging from a dark-green eye.) I tend to call them by their common name, amaryllis, but when looking for unusual bulbs to plant for a winter display, it's worth searching under the scientific *Hippeastrum*. One lesson I've learned the hard way is the open flowers make amaryllis top-heavy, so never perch the pots anywhere they can fall over – this makes a terrible mess.

TOP TIP

Don't forget to feed your house plants, they will pay you back handsomely for this attention. Research each plant's needs – most will only need a little liquid feed added to their water occasionally.

Cape primrose (*Streptocarpus* hybrid)

With minimal care, you'll get a succession of blooms all summer from cape primroses, as I was pleased to discover when mine, kept by a cool west-facing window, first rewarded me with months of flowers. There's a broad range of flower colours, often shown off impressively in plant-show marquee displays, so there's one to suit every windowsill. Plus, for propagation geeks, the leaves can be cut into segments, each of which will easily root in compost, having its own copious supply of rooting hormone!

Spider plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*)

My fondness for these goes back to my childhood with a green-fingered grandma. Noting my interest in her house plants she gave me a baby plantlet to grow on. I can't claim to have kept the same one until now, but I am caring for another plant that was gifted from a friend. Your spider plant will handle neglect but if, like me, you give it a summer holiday outdoors, don't forget to bring it in again in autumn or you'll have to beg for another dangling plantlet to nurture.

Sonya Patel Ellis
Senior Content Creator

Blue star fern (*Phlebodium aureum*)

I'm a bit of a pteridophile (fern lover) and have tried growing various fern or fern-like plants indoors, with little success in a draughty house. My blue star fern, in contrast, has thrived in indirect light, adapting to average humidity levels as long as I give it a regular drink ensuring not to soak its orangey-brown rhizomes. It's also a winner in terms of its softly striking blue-green elongated fronds, which look lovely against terracotta, earthy or plaster-effect pots.

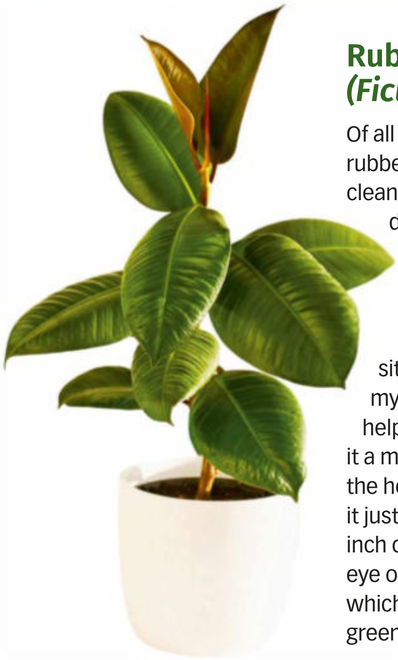
TOP TIP
Choose house plants according to your space and lifestyle. If you're busy, go for low-maintenance plants that tolerate a range of light conditions and don't need frequent care and attention.

Peace lily (*Spathiphyllum wallisii*)

I moved house recently and downsizing available shelves or windowsills with the right light conditions also meant editing my house-plant collection. Ultimately, the low-maintenance contenders won, including a trio of peace lilies.

These glossy-leaved plants with their tall, white 'flowers' (actually petal-like spathes surrounding a central spike) fare well in a range of situations, from a relatively bright spot in my bedroom to a shadier corner of my kitchen.

I've also got one in the bathroom, where it thrives on the humidity. They also remind me to water them if I forget when things get busy, as the leaves really wilt when they're thirsty. Luckily, they bounce back quickly once they've had a drink!



Rubber plant (*Ficus elastica*)

Of all the larger house plants, the rubber plant is my favourite, with its clean, structural lines, thick, waxy, dark-green leaves and bronze undersides, and pinky-purple stipules (leaf-like growths at the base of the leaf stalk).

I have a large specimen that sits in a corner of indirect light in my lounge. I dust the leaves to help it photosynthesise, and give it a mist to improve humidity when the heating is on. Apart from that, it just needs a water when the top inch of soil is dry. I've also got my eye on the variegated *Ficus* 'Belize', which has beautiful pink, cream and green foliage.

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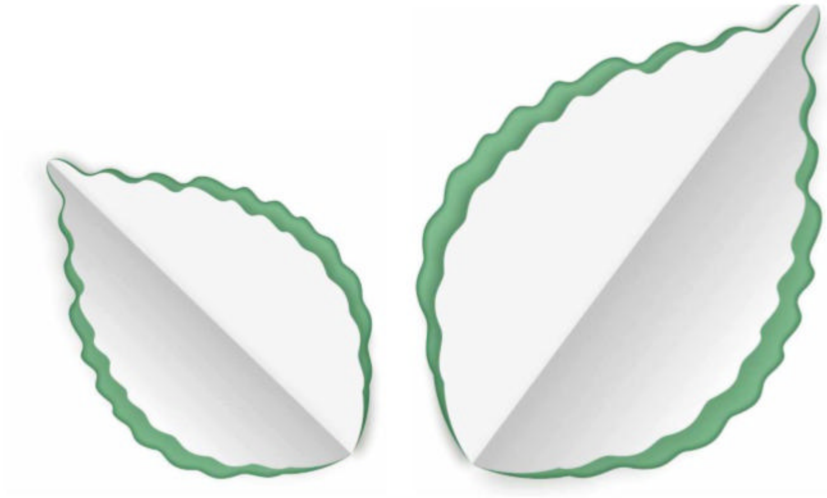

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10 nature-led ways to feed birds

Want to give wild birds a natural boost this winter? **Kate Bradbury** explains how to attract a wide diversity of birds to forage within your garden and why this is so beneficial

Sunflower heads provide a nutritious feast for seed-eating birds such as greenfinches

Kate Bradbury is a garden writer specialising in wildlife gardening. She is the author of six books on wildlife gardening and is the Wildlife Editor of *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine.*

> *“Let’s improve our garden habitats to provide more food as nature intended”*

For years we’ve been encouraged to feed garden birds, both for their benefit and our enjoyment. I’ve written countless articles on the most calorific food to help birds through winter and get them into good shape for breeding. When research revealed the benefits of feeding all year round, I was there too, explaining that offering adult birds food in summer would help more chicks survive.

And more chicks did survive. Garden birds do very well from us feeding them, including declining species like house sparrows, tree sparrows and starlings. But new research* suggests that increases in some populations can be problematic, with growing numbers of dominant garden and woodland birds, such as great tits and great spotted woodpeckers, linked to declines in subordinate woodland species like willow and marsh tits. The dominant birds monopolise nest sites and food resources over the more timid species that are less likely to visit feeders. From 1967 to 2022, great tit numbers increased by 82 per cent and great spotted woodpeckers by 388 per cent. Meanwhile willow tits declined by 96 per cent and marsh tits by 80 per cent. It seems we gardeners are giving dominant birds an unfair advantage.

Diseases, too, are spread at feeding stations. In 2005, the protozoan parasite *Trichomonas gallinae* jumped from wood pigeons to finches, resulting in a 66 per cent loss of greenfinches over 10 years. Cleaning feeders is said to prevent infection but how many of us do this often enough?

Is it time to look again at the way we feed birds? How can we support those that need help without giving an unfair advantage to others? More research is needed, but in the meantime let’s improve our garden habitats to provide more food as nature intended, so birds can feed themselves.

*E-SPACE.MMU.AC.UK/628250

Natural abundance

Turn your garden into a bird-friendly sanctuary by providing a wide range of natural foraging opportunities

Plant native tree and shrubs

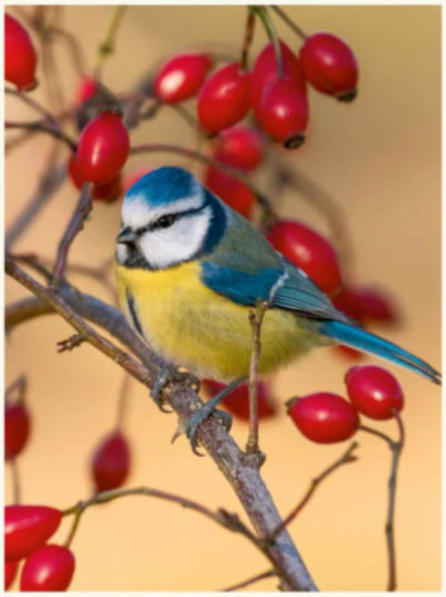
Native trees and shrubs attract more egg-laying insects than non-natives. Choose trees such as birch, crab apple or field maple or plant mixed hedges of hawthorn, hazel and dog rose. Birds will seek out the insects, their eggs and larvae all year round.

Stop controlling pests

Birds such as house sparrows and chiffchaffs eat aphids, while thrushes and starlings eat slugs and snails. Blackbirds eat vine weevil larvae and robins eat moths. Take a more relaxed approach to pests and let the birds control them for you.

Leave areas of long grass

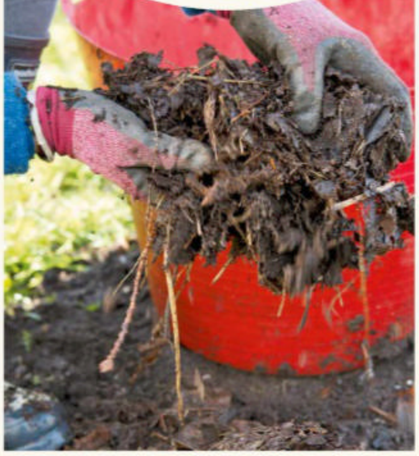
Long grass is a great habitat for a huge number of species, from moth and butterfly larvae to grasshoppers and ground beetles. In summer, grass seed will be eaten by sparrows and all year round birds can forage for bugs among the thatch.



ABOVE Blue tits search for insects, seeds and caterpillars in gardens all year round
LEFT Thrushes can help keep snails in check as they know how to smash their shells

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/ANDYWORKS, SANDRA STANDBRIDGE

> *“Piling up logs, sticks and other plant material creates an invertebrate-rich feast for all sorts of birds”*



LEFT Make a log pile where birds can forage for invertebrates **TOP** Add more berrying plants for blackbirds **RIGHT** Apply mulch to feed worms and other soil-life

Keep seedheads standing

The easiest way to feed birds in winter is to not cut down seedheads in autumn. Teasels, sunflowers, greater knapweed, cardoons, asters and lamb’s ear will all attract seed-eating birds, while also adding ornamental interest to gardens through winter.

Add a pond

Garden ponds not only provides bathing and drinking opportunities for birds, but feeding opportunities too. From tadpoles and froglets to other invertebrate larvae such as dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, birds will have breakfast, lunch and dinner sorted throughout spring and summer.

Delicate seedheads are perfect for smaller bird species such as goldfinches

Choose berrying plants

Berries are rich in calories and can help birds get in shape for migration and spring breeding. Nutritious choices include holly, rowan, hawthorn, honeysuckle and dogwood. Fruits such as rosehips and crab apples will also support birds like blackbirds and robins.

Grow caterpillar foodplants

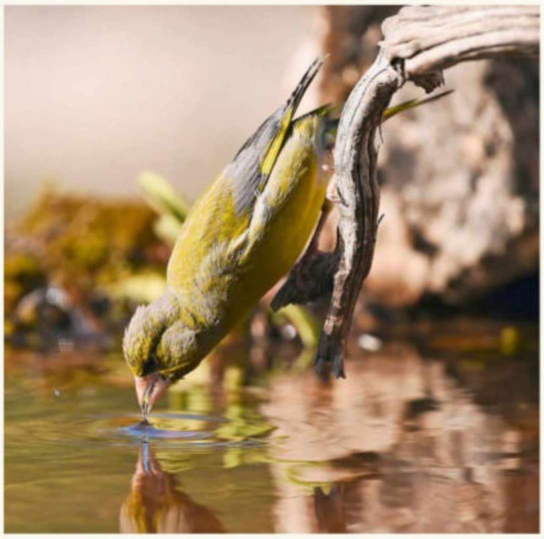
Most birds feed caterpillars to their chicks, as they’re juicy and rich in protein. You can boost your garden’s caterpillar population by allowing a few ‘weeds’ to flourish, such as dandelions, bedstraw and docks, and grow foxgloves, nasturtiums and primroses.

Leave windfalls on the ground

Apples and pears will be eaten by blackbirds and migrant thrushes such as redwings and fieldfares, which might arrive in large groups. You don’t have to give up your prized crop, simply leave windfalls on the ground, so birds can make the most of them.

Feed your soil

Mulching with homemade compost and leafmould will support worms and other soil invertebrates. Letting autumn leaves stay where they fall – except on lawns and paths – mimics the natural cycle of woodlands and provides a veritable feast for blackbirds.



A pond brings any garden to life, attracting birds to drink, bathe and forage for food

Avoid burning waste

Burning garden waste destroys habitats and any invertebrates sheltering in them, such as spiders, beetles and woodlice. Instead make a large, open compost heap that will break down slowly and provide lots of feeding opportunities for wrens, blackbirds and more.

Make habitat piles

Piling up logs, sticks and other plant material in quiet corners creates an invertebrate-rich feast for all sorts of birds, including robins and wrens. These will hop among the debris, seeking out insects and spiders.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/ALBERTO CLEMARES EXPÓSITO, ASHLEY COOPER, SANDRA STANDBRIDGE

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Hemerocallis String Bikini

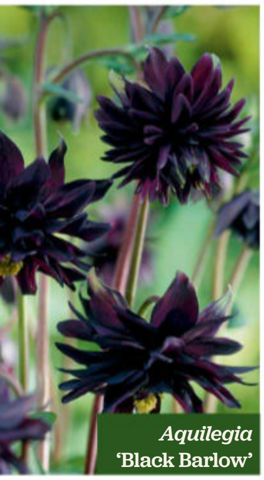
Dahlia 'Rhubarb and Custard'

Dahlia Tyrell

Dahlia Pink Petticoat

Miscanthus 'Lady in Red'

Hydrangea Little Fresco


Aquilegia 'Black Barlow'

Scabiosa Kudo Blue

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New series

Growing THE GOOD LIFE

If you've always wanted your own mini farm, let urban smallholder **Sara Ward** show you how

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

Sara Ward is a passionate advocate for community food growing and is director of social enterprise Cultivate London. She is author of *Living the Good Life in the City: A Journey to Self-Sufficiency* (Pimpernel Press, £20). ***@hencorner***

> “Here, in our little corner of West London, we have transformed our home into an urban smallholding”

Sara Ward’s city garden is home to a veg patch, fruit trees and lots of chickens

I love January – it’s the season of fresh starts. We can forget the failures of last year and look ahead with faith that this growing year will find us gathering in bountiful harvests of all our favourite food.

Here, in our little corner of West London, we have transformed our home into an urban smallholding with fruit and nut trees, a small kitchen garden, lots of hens and three hives of honeybees. We log all the food that we harvest and delight in seeing not only how much money we’ve saved, but also how much we’ve reduced our impact on the environment. In 2023, we harvested £4,200 worth of food and saved nearly 340kg of CO_2* from being released into the atmosphere compared to relying on commercial intensive farming.

My happy place is my riverside allotment. I’ve only had it for a few years and my initial intention was to use it for fruit trees and honeybees, but once I cleared the brambles I saw that I could designate areas for a wide range of vegetable and berry beds, too.

It’s all in the planning – and January is the perfect time to start!

Planning ahead

While January days can be short, there’s still opportunity to plan your sowing to start the year as you mean to go on. Buying a new pack of tomato seeds, or finding that envelope of seeds saved from a special variety last year, can be the first task to get the ball rolling. At the end of the month or in February, I sow the tomato seeds, two at a time in modules of peat-free seed compost, taking care to label them with the name of the variety – as I can’t tell the difference between yellow cherries and big Green Tiger tomatoes from those early leaves. Ensuring everything is well labelled helps later in the year when planting out. A real favourite is ‘Gardener’s Delight’, which is happy to grow outside and produces good quantities of reliable fruit just larger than a standard cherry tomato, with a lovely concentrated flavour.

I choose my aubergine seeds now too, which I will sow in a heated propagator to get them started. As I don’t have a greenhouse, I’m aiming for strong, mature plants by May so that I can plant them out in the garden after the last frosts. This will give good time for local bumblebees to find the delicate flowers, feast on the nectar and pollinate them.

Throughout January, we may be blessed with a few sunny days on which, if the ground isn’t too hard, garlic cloves can be planted for a summer harvest. It’s best to

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*GOODTOGROWUK.ORG/CO2-NOTES/

Late winter can be surprisingly bountiful with the right crops

Garlic enjoys the free-draining soil conditions of raised beds

buy new bulbs for planting; there are many varieties to choose from. Garlic loves easy draining soil that's been enriched with organic matter, such as homemade compost. Once your planting area is prepared, carefully prise apart the individual cloves from the bulb, leaving the skin on and taking care not to damage the base plate at the bottom as this is where the roots will grow from. I plant each clove about 4cm deep and 10cm apart, with the pointed end sticking upwards. Keep an eye out for weeds as they'll rob your garlic of valuable water and compete for sunlight. Apart from that, garlic is an easy crop to grow, so you can start dreaming of those summer Mediterranean recipes.

I've found that a faithful crop for the allotment is potatoes; they are pretty tough, and good for breaking up soil that hasn't been cultivated for a while. I choose several different varieties and particularly love a red spud, such as 'Desiree', probably because they are easier to spot at harvest time. Having said that, I've harvested a fair few smooth brown stones from the potato bed along with my maincrops in previous years! Potato chitting can be started around late January in our very mild London location, usually around six weeks before you want to plant them. This involves putting the seed potatoes somewhere warmish with plenty of light, usually in the cups of an old egg box. This encourages strong, stout shoots to emerge and gives the tubers a head start for their final planting in the ground.

There are a couple of traditional planting dates that I like to follow: on St Patrick's day (17 March) or by Good Friday (this year, 18 April). But it's also said that you can get planting once the soil is warm enough to sit on with your bare bottom!

Winter spoils

I tend to grow my delicate crops in the home garden, where I can keep an eye on them daily. The more sturdy crops, particularly those that take a long time to grow or need extra space, can grow at their own pace at the allotment.

Winter growth may be slower, but many crops are improved by a little bit of cold, and can be the foundation of a warming supper. January, even if under a dusting of snow, can yield parsnips, leeks and several members of the brassica family, including purple sprouting broccoli. I'm particularly excited about the beautiful purple Brussels sprouts that we've grown this year – I just need to work out the best way to cook them without them losing their colour in the process.

Purple sprouting broccoli offers repeat pickings in late winter and early spring

> *“Many crops are improved by a bit of cold, and can be the foundation of a warming supper”*

JANUARY Jobs

While the garden can appear to be on pause this month, it's the perfect time to have a tidy up, a cut back and a sort through plants that are past their best. Every January, my husband and I set aside a weekend to prune our fruit trees. We have three apple trees and a pear in the garden, with many more fruit trees at the allotment. The aim of this winter pruning session is to remove damaged or diseased branches, to ensure the tree has an open shape for maximum airflow, and to reduce the canopy of big trees to keep them manageable. We've learned over the years that, as well as secateurs and loppers, you need a sharp, clean pruning saw to cut any thicker branches back to main joints, and not to remove more than 20 per cent of the total canopy. We've also discovered that using a pole extension on the saw when pruning high branches is both safer and easier than standing on a ladder.

Once we've removed the branches, larger ones can be stacked in a corner or along a fence to create a dead hedge as a habitat for wildlife, while smaller ends can be cut up with secateurs and put in the compost bin.

✔ **Compost bin** While the compost bin is open, look around the veg plot for plants that have finished. I find that cauliflowers can be a bit temperamental – they have so much promise as they grow, but don't always deliver the goods. Pull up any that are not going to feed you, and allow them to nourish your future crops. We keep two big compost bins, one for adding to and one for taking from. A good turn of the contents with a garden fork will help all the microorganisms to access the air that they need to break down old organic matter. Homemade compost makes the perfect mulch for raised beds, both improving the soil and adding nutrients, while also helping to retain essential soil moisture close to plant roots.

✔ **Pots** With apples pruned and the compost bin fed, sorting through pots and giving them a quick wash helps to get us ready for the season ahead. As I said at the beginning, it's all in the planning – and when everything is in order, it's time to dream of those future crops over a mug of tea.

> “Sorting through pots and giving them a quick wash helps to get us ready for the season ahead”

ABOVE It's worth taking time while it's quiet to tidy up and clean pots

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NEXT MONTH Sara turns her attention to her allotment, with planting plans and jobs to start off the growing season

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And finally, head to the Minoan cemetery of Armeni, where masses of spring flowers bloom in the beautiful flower-strewn Cretan landscape.

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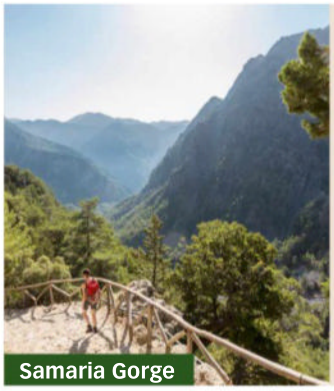
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January

Growing guide

Use our at-a-glance guide to find the best fruit and vegetables to sow and plant now

Sow indoors 🟪 **Plant/sow outdoors** 🟩 **Harvest** 🟧

	Key crops for January	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	Apples Contain pectin, a soluble fibre that supports digestion and may protect your gut wall, cookers especially. **Tip** The rootstock will determine the final size of the tree. Choose a dwarfing rootstock if space is limited. **Plant** ↓ at nursery level **Final spacing** ↔ 1-6m ↗ up to 9m for a standard tree	🟩	🟩	🟩					🟧	🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩
	Blueberries High on the health stakes, these are rich in polyphenols, which reduce the risk of heart disease. **Tip** Blueberries can be grown in shade, but they'll produce a bigger crop when given a sunny location. **Plant** ↓ at nursery level **Final spacing** ↔ 1.5m apart ↗ 1.5m between rows	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩		🟧	🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩	🟩	🟩
	Cauliflowers A source of choline, an essential nutrient for mood and memory that also helps brain development. **Tip** Prefers soil that is low in nitrogen, so there is no need to add fertiliser before sowing. **Sow** ↓ 2cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ↗ 60cm between rows	🟪 🟧	🟪 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩	🟩 🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟧	🟧
	Garlic The more damage you do to garlic before cooking, the more blood-thinning properties you'll get. **Tip** Plant in modules or pots, and keep in a greenhouse or cold frame if frosty. Plant more deeply in light soil. **Plant** ↓ 3-10cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟩			🟧	🟧	🟧		🟩	🟩	🟩
	Leeks Despite their mild flavour, leeks are higher in carotene than onions, and are rich in folate and vitamin C. **Tip** Transplant when pencil-thin, once the weather improves. Water in, then keep well watered all season. **Plant** ↓ 2.5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 15-20cm apart ↗ 30-38cm between rows	🟪 🟧	🟪 🟧		🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧
	Lettuces The outer leaves have greater sun exposure, making them three times richer in heart-healthy polyphenols. **Tip** Lettuces dislike root disturbance, so sow in modules and transplant as soon as they can be handled. **Plant** ↓ 1cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ↗ 23cm between rows	🟪		🟩	🟩	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟧	
	Raspberries Low in calories and rich in vitamin C, these are good for a healthy diet and maintaining youthful skin. **Tip** Raspberries need good drainage and rich, deep soil, so ideally grow them in a raised bed if soil is poor. **Plant** ↓ 3-5cm below soil level **Final spacing** ↔ 35-45cm apart ↗ 1.5m between rows	🟩	🟩	🟩			🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟩	🟩
	Rhubarb Packed with compounds that support the digestive function and strengthen the immune defences. **Tip** Mulch around the crown, then fertilise and water well through the summer to keep the plant vigorous. **Plant** ↓ at soil level **Final spacing** ↔ 90cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟩 🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧			🟩	🟩	🟩
	Shallots Small in size, but shallots contain six times more polyphenols than your everyday onion. **Tip** Birds lifting the bulbs can be a problem, so cover with horticultural fleece after planting. **Plant** ↓ with tips just showing **Final spacing** ↔ 25cm apart ↗ 30cm between rows	🟩	🟩	🟩				🟧	🟧		🟩	🟩	🟩
	Whitecurrants Sweet and a good source of vitamin C. Pick and store with stalks attached to extend their shelf life. **Tip** Grow as a cordon or bush, or fan trained against a wall, in a sunny, sheltered spot. **Plant** ↓ 5cm deeper than it was in its pot **Final spacing** ↔ 1.5-2m between bush plants	🟩	🟩	🟩			🟧	🟧	🟧			🟩	🟩

Visit GardenersWorld.com/what-to-do-now for more advice on the best crops to sow and plant this month, and how to do it

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Naomi

Hayloft Plant Specialist

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GWHY

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WHAT TO DO NOW

50 things to do this month from the *Gardeners' World* team

106 Top up raised beds

104 Look after winter salad leaves

94 Keep paths free of ice

98 Cut off old hellebore leaves

103 Plant bare-root roses

PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

PLUS ■ Planting a wildlife hedge ■ Pruning wisteria ■ Improving lawn drainage ■ Planting garlic ■ Lifting tree crowns

Improve lawn drainage with a garden fork

If puddles stand on areas of your lawn for long periods after rain, this may be due to compacted soil, often caused by regular footfall. The grass can start to die off in these waterlogged areas, leaving bare patches. To avoid this and improve the drainage, use a garden fork to make holes in the lawn, pushing the prongs deeply into the soil at 10cm intervals across the affected area.

If the compaction is severe, use a hollow-tined aerator instead, which removes plugs of soil. Then brush sand or grit into the holes to keep them open and improve the drainage in the longer term.

Spike waterlogged areas of lawn with a garden fork to make deep holes that will allow rain to sink in

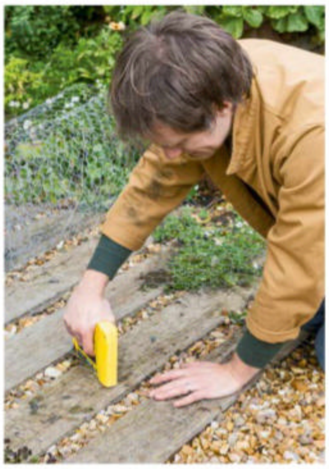
30 MINUTES TO SPARE

January is a great time to plan design changes to your garden. Sketch out some ideas, measure up the space and research the materials and costs. Then draw up a plan of action to get the project completed.

Get a better grip

Wooden pathways and decking can get very slippery in winter, so staple galvanised chicken wire over them to provide better grip underfoot. Use good quality, small-gauge chicken wire and plenty of staples to hold it firmly in place and stop it rucking up and becoming a trip hazard. Pull it taut and fold over the edges, stapling those down too. To get it perfectly flat, work from one end and pull the wire taut each time you add a staple.

Brush fallen leaves and debris from the surface regularly to keep it in the best condition.

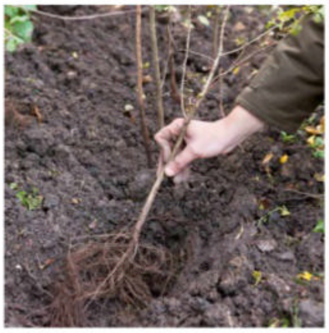


Staple chicken wire to wooden paths so they're less slippery

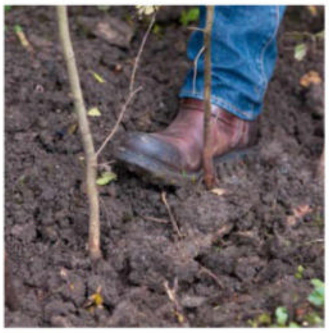
STEP BY STEP

Plant a bare-root wildlife hedge

A hedge of native trees and shrubs, such as hawthorn, sloe, dogwood and holly, will provide food and shelter for a wealth of wildlife. Young bare-root plants (whips) are available now from hedging suppliers. Allow plenty of space, as the hedge will grow to a width of at least 1m.



1 WEED your planting site, then make a V-shaped trench by pushing a spade down into the soil and rocking it back and forth. Arrange the plants 40-50cm apart.



2 HOLD each plant in turn and push the soil back in place around its roots. Tread the soil down to get rid of any air pockets and keep the plants upright.

3 SOAK the ground along the row and re-tread if any plants have been disturbed. Water again during dry spells in spring when the leaves start to appear.

Use a pruning saw to cut back thick woody stems, and loppers or secateurs on smaller side-shoots

Cut back black-leaved elders

Towards the end of the month, prune black-leaved elders to encourage a vibrant display of fresh young foliage in spring. Pruning will also restrict the plant's height, as elders can make very large shrubs if left to grow unchecked. But only start pruning elders after at least two full years growing in the garden.

Use a pruning saw to cut the main stems down to about 90cm from ground level, then cut back any side-branches to 8-10cm. This will encourage new side-shoots, which will create a low well-branched shrub rather than a tall top-heavy tree.

Don't forget

- ☐ Keep your pond clear of debris and place a floating ball in it to prevent all the water freezing
- ☐ Dig out perennial weeds by the roots
- ☐ Sow tree and shrub seeds and keep the pots or trays in a coldframe
- ☐ Avoid walking on very wet or frozen lawns if possible
- ☐ Recycle your Christmas tree

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS
PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; TIM SANDALL

Reveal the full beauty of the canes by removing all the side-shoots

Tidy up clumps of bamboo

Show off the attractive canes of bamboo to the full by cutting off the wispy leafy shoots that sprout lower down. Use secateurs to cut these back as close to the point of origin as possible. Clear away the side-shoots up to the same level each time for the best effect, so you have a uniform height of clean canes with a leafy canopy above it.

Do this every year, as more shoots will appear this summer. Be careful of the tiny snags left along the canes – they can be very sharp.

Weed patios

Keep patios looking good by removing weeds and moss from between the blocks or slabs. Annual weeds are usually easy to pull out, but some weeds root in firmly and require a blade to hook them out. Patio weeding knives are useful for this and more efficient than using the edge of a hoe. Most have an L-shaped blade that you scrape along the gap to lift out moss and weeds. Long-handled versions avoid the need to bend down. Sweep up the debris to finish.

Some weeds can be pulled out, others will require a blade

Clean and oil tool handles

Wooden tool handles can last a lifetime if well looked after – and oiling or waxing them is a perfect job for January. First, clean the handle with a damp cloth, then dry it in a warm room for a few hours. Warming it helps the oil to penetrate into the wood. If there are any nicks or scratches, smooth these off with sandpaper to avoid getting splinters in your hands. Then rub linseed oil or tool wax into the handle and allow it to soak in for a few minutes before buffing with a soft cloth.

Oil wooden handles annually to keep them in good condition

Lift tree crowns

Removing the lower branches of trees is known as crown lifting. It can be a useful way to thicken up the canopy, clear a low sight-line through the garden or let more light reach plants below. You can do it now on deciduous trees, apart from cherries and plums, which should be pruned in late spring.

When removing a branch, make a clean cut close to the trunk using a pruning saw. Stand back regularly to assess which branches to remove. Finish by snipping off any smaller shoots that drop below the new canopy level.

Hold the branch securely while you saw through it close to the main trunk

Keep paths free of ice

Check local weather forecasts regularly for sub-zero temperatures, particularly after spells of rain, and apply salt or grit to walkways before they freeze. If you get caught out by a sudden snowfall, sweep it off your paths as soon as you can, then sprinkle salt on the surface to make it safe to walk on. Local authorities often provide grit bins so residents can help themselves to a bucketful, to scatter on their pathways. If not, you can buy bags of de-icing brown or white rock salt. A thin sprinkling is all you need to make it safe.

Scatter salt or grit on paths to get rid of ice or snow

Beechgrove

BEECHGROVE ON TV

The series is off-air until spring, but the garden is tended over winter. Watch any missed episodes on BBC iPlayer.

Apply teak oil or wood preserver to prolong the life of wooden furniture

VIEW FROM BEECHGROVE

Look after wooden furniture

Move wooden furniture into a garage or shed if you have the space, to help preserve the wood and stop it getting too wet. If it's already damp, raise it off the floor by standing it on battens to help it dry out, then scrape off any moss or algae. Give it a light sanding, then apply a thin coat of teak oil. Wooden feet can be soaked overnight in a shallow saucer of clear wood preserver to prevent them absorbing ground moisture. If you aren't able to bring furniture inside, cover it with a tarpaulin and secure it in several places with durable string to stop it blowing away.

Don't forget

- ☐ Water indoor citrus plants and apply a winter feed
- ☐ Order seeds of chillies, sweet peppers and aubergines to give them an early start next month
- ☐ Add water to leafmould bins if the leaves are very dry
- ☐ Top up bark paths with fresh bark chippings
- ☐ Move small shrubs and roses while dormant if they're in the wrong place, as long as the soil isn't really wet

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

Gardeners' World offer

'Sarah Bernhardt'

'Shirley Temple'

'Karl Rosenfield'

SAVE OVER 50%

Brighten your borders with a trio of peonies

Herbaceous peonies are a cottage-garden staple that grow bigger and better with age. Just pot up these bare roots and grow on until large enough to plant out.

'Sarah Bernhardt'
Gorgeous rose-pink, double flowers appear in profusion in early summer. These large blooms have ruffled inner petals and are simply stunning.
Height x Spread 90cm x 90cm
Flowers Jun-Jul
■ 1 bare root **£9.99** *(15998)*

'Shirley Temple'
Red buds open to reveal pretty pale pink double blooms that slowly fade to white, giving the flower a subtle two-tone appearance.
H x S 80cm x 80cm **F** Jun-Jul
■ 1 bare root **£9.99** *(13364)*

'Karl Rosenfield'
Blowsy, deeply ruffled, double magenta blooms that will add a touch of drama to your early summer border display.
H x S 80cm x 80cm **F** Jun-Jul
■ 1 bare root **£9.99** *(15981)*

SAVER COLLECTION

■ **Peony Collection**
3 bare roots Contains 1 each of 'Sarah Bernhardt', 'Shirley Temple' and 'Karl Rosenfield' ~~£29.97~~ **£12.99**
SAVE £16.98 *(16117)*

■ **Peony Collection**
6 bare roots Contains 2 each of 'Sarah Bernhardt', 'Karl Rosenfield' and 'Shirley Temple' ~~£59.94~~ **£18.99**
SAVE £40.95 *(KF1551)*

MORE OFFERS

■ ***Lilium* 'Pretty Woman'**
A towering giant lily with pure white fragrant blooms.
H x S 180cm x 45cm **F** Jul-Aug
5 bulbs ~~£12.99~~ **£11.99**
SAVE £1 *(62859)*
10 Bulbs ~~£25.98~~ **£17.99**
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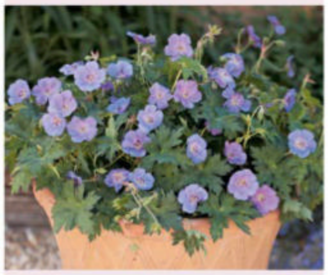

■ ***Geranium* Rozanne**
Masses of blue blooms with dainty white centres.
H x S 40cm x 60cm **F** Jun-Oct
3 bare roots ~~£14.99~~ **£12.99**
SAVE £2 *(KF7160)*
6 bare roots ~~£29.99~~ **£19.99**
SAVE £10 *(KF7161)*

■ **Agapanthus Blue & White Collection**
A mix of Blue 'Queen of the Ocean' and white 'Polar Ice'.
H x S 120cm x 60cm **F** Jul-Sep
6 bare roots (3 of each)
~~£47.94~~ **£14.99**
SAVE £32.95 *(KF9515)*

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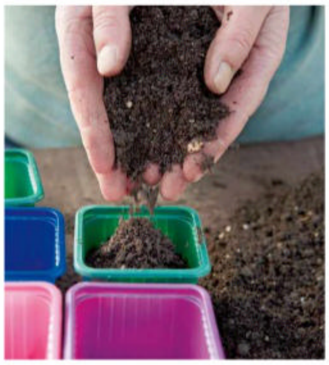
SUTTONS

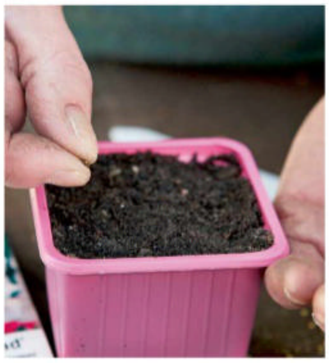
STEP BY STEP

Sow perennials

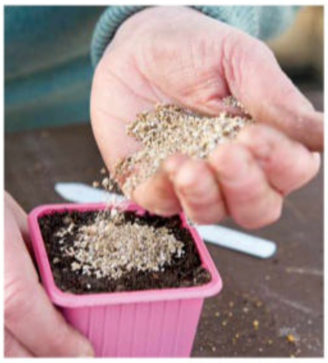
Several perennials will flower this summer if sown now – easy options include catmint, verbena and scabious. Germinate the seeds in gentle heat or in a sunny coldframe. Prick out the seedlings when large enough, planting several around the edge of a 13cm pot. Then plant the whole pot into a border in early summer.



1 FILL a small pot with peat-free gritty or loam-based seed compost. If it feels coarse, sieve a fine layer on the surface.



2 TAKE a pinch of seeds and sow sparsely across the surface. Use the tip of a pencil to spread out any clumps of seeds.



3 COVER with a thin layer of fine vermiculite. Place in a tray of water to soak up moisture without disturbing the seeds.

Trim off all the tatty old leaves of hellebores, so their beautiful winter flowers will stand out clearly

Tidy up hellebores

Remove all of last year's leaves from your hellebores. Follow the leaf stalk down to the base and cut it off at ground level. Just be careful to avoid any flower stems emerging among the foliage. This tidy-up allows the flowers to be seen at their best and reduces the chances of leaf spot disease on the new leaves. Weed around the plants while you're there, water if dry and apply a thick layer of mulch to keep the soil healthy and give the flowers a perfect contrasting backdrop.

Buy polyanthus in bloom, so you can select your favourite colours

Plant vibrant polyanthus

Add a boost of colour to shady spots during these short, dark days by planting plenty of polyanthus. They're in flower already and will keep going into spring, so you can choose them by colour now.

Polyanthus like plenty of moisture, so water them well before planting and improve the soil with garden compost. Use a trowel to plant them, holding them just under the rosette of leaves to protect the soft flower stems while you firm them in with your hands. Water again to settle them in, then apply a mulch of garden compost.

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Renew the top layer of compost in pots that are home to large shrubs and trees. Scrape away about 5cm of compost from the surface and use a narrow-bladed weeding tool to dig out any deep-rooted weeds or tree seedlings. Replace with fresh compost, and remember to use ericaceous compost for acid-loving plants.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS
PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; TIM SANDALL

Don't forget

- ☐ Tie in climbers such as jasmine to prevent wind damage, and cut out any dead stems
- ☐ Remove one or two of the oldest stems or branches at the base of mature shrubs such as lilac and berberis
- ☐ Deadhead winter bedding and pick off any yellowing leaves
- ☐ Cut back vigorous climbers that are growing towards your guttering or blocking windows
- ☐ Pick out any debris that has accumulated in the crown of alpine plants, to prevent them rotting

Shorten wisteria stems so the flowers won't be hidden by leaves

Prune and prepare wisteria

Now is the time to prune wisteria to prepare it for flowering. Start by pulling out any stems twining through the main framework that you missed when pruning in summer. Then trim back any stems that have grown beyond the supports.

Flower buds form on the spur system near the main framework. They swell quickly, so on a warm wall you may be able to see them starting to swell already, behind the youngest twiggy growth. Cut back all the weak twiggy growth to just two or three buds.

TOP TIP

Plant winter-flowering evergreens, such as skimmias and viburnums, in pots this month. Choose a deep pot that's at least 10cm wider than the rootball and use soil-based compost. Position the plant centrally and make sure it stands upright, then firm in. Water well, then place the pot where it can be seen easily, such as on a patio or near your front door, especially if you've chosen a fragrant plant such as sweet box.

Deadhead house plants

Snip off the spent flowers of house plants such as azaleas and African violets (saintpaulia)before they go mouldy. First, move the plant into good light and onto a surface at a comfortable height to spend some time on it. Then trace the flower stalk down to the base and cut it off cleanly.

Depending on the plant, deadheading may encourage more flowers to develop or make way for the next set of foliage to grow. Doing this in a well-lit spot also allows you to check the plant for pests and diseases. If you can spot them at an early stage, they're easier to remedy.

Keep flowering house plants looking good by deadheading

Establish new colonies of snowdrops beneath deciduous trees and shrubs using potted plants in flower

Start planting potted snowdrops in flower

With the snowdrop season under way, it's easy to start up colonies in your garden using potted plants available in flower. Garden centres offer tough, easy-to-grow choices for instant winter cheer, while specialist snowdrop events sell a wider selection of varieties with a diversity of flower markings.

Choose a planting spot with humus-rich, moisture-retentive but not waterlogged soil. Snowdrops tolerate foliage cover through the summer so are ideal under shrubs or near clumps of perennials. Gently tip the snowdrops out of the pot and plant as a clump, then water in and mulch the soil.

Grow your FREE seeds

This month, subscribers received FREE cosmos 'Candy Stripe' and radish 'French Breakfast 3' seeds. With another growing season ahead, starting to sow this pretty annual flower and easy salad vegetable will help you get into the habit of regular sowing. Radishes can be sown every couple of weeks until autumn for a steady supply of crunchy roots, and cosmos sown before winter is over will give you sizeable plants that you can use to fill your borders, beds or pots after the last frost.

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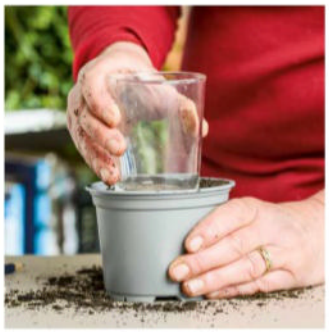
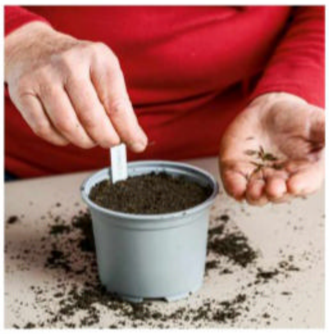
3 reasons to grow cosmos 'Candy Stripe'

- ■ Will flower this year after a sowing in late winter
- ■ Produces large blooms on tall stems all through summer
- ■ Soft, billowing foliage that helps to fill out borders

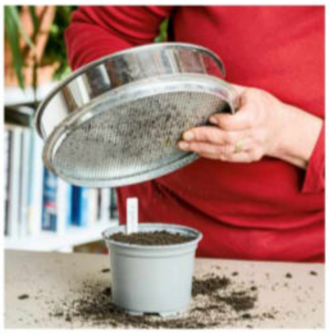
STEP BY STEP Sowing your cosmos from seed



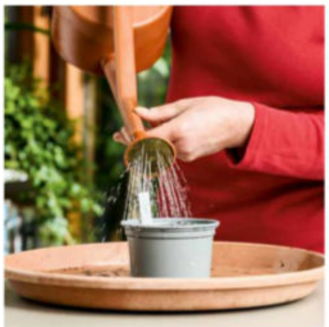
1 FILL an 8-10cm pot with good-quality, peat-free multi-purpose compost. Use the bottom of a tumbler to firm the compost and create a level sowing surface.



2 PLACE individual seeds on the compost surface, spacing them 3cm apart to give each seedling enough space to develop and to make transplanting easier.



3 SIEVE more compost and gently shake it over the pot so the seeds are just covered. Place a label in the pot so you don't get it mixed up with other sowings.



4 PLACE a saucer under the pot and water carefully. Keep in a well-lit spot or propagator at 15-20°C. Your seedlings should appear within three weeks.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM; TIM SANDALL

In partnership with Mr Fothergill's
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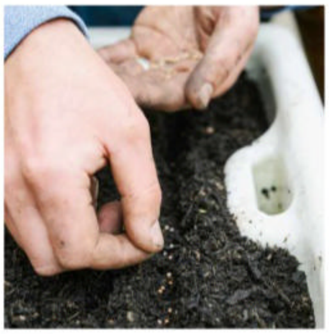
Mr.Fothergill's
Gardeners' World
Radish
'French Breakfast 3'
Fast growing • Mild tasting
Cosmos
'Candy Stripe'
Tall and striking • Flowers for months

3 reasons to grow radish

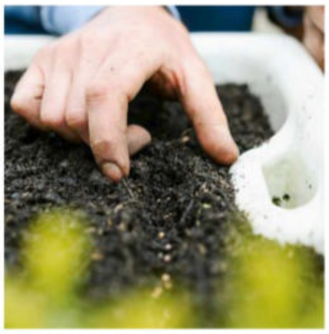
- A fast-growing salad crop to sow from late winter to autumn
- Its mild-tasting, cylindrical roots take up little room
- An excellent source of vitamin C

*DUE TO RESTRICTIONS ON MOVING PLANTS AND SEEDS OVERSEAS, WE REGRET THAT WE ARE UNABLE TO PROVIDE FREE SEEDS ON SUBSCRIPTION COPIES OUTSIDE MAINLAND UK.

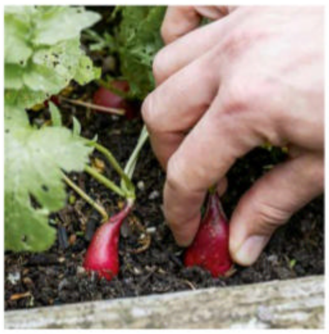
STEP BY STEP Sowing your radishes from seed



1 SOW the seeds thinly in rows 20cm apart, in trays of moist, peat-free, multi-purpose compost. Start the seeds in trays indoors, or outdoors under a cloche.



2 COVER the seeds so they are 1.5cm deep and remember to label the crop. Water again if the compost goes dusty and dry. Look out for seedlings in 7-14 days



3 HARVEST the roots within 6-8 weeks. Sow new batches every 2-3 weeks for a regular supply. Thin out congested seedlings and use them in salads.

Don't miss next month's FREE* seeds

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BBC Gardeners' World magazine GUIDE

Reissued for... 2024 Reissued for...

Planting bare-root roses now helps them to establish a little before spring arrives

Plant roses

Start to plant bare-root roses now, as long as the ground isn't frozen or waterlogged. Choose a spot that gets sun for at least half the day and prepare it by clearing weeds and groundcover plants that may compete too much. Most roses need a good square metre of space in all directions. Add plenty of rich compost or manure, too, because roses are hungry feeders.

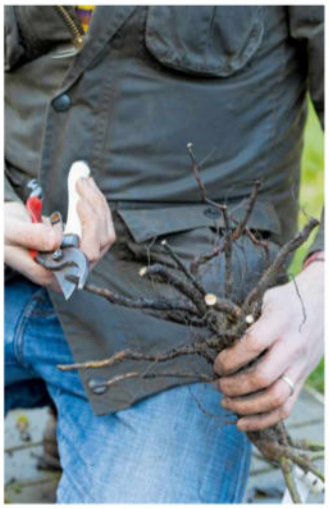
Soak the roots for an hour in a bucket of water before you plant, even in the winter, because they lose water quickly while in transit.

Use some mycorrhizal fungi to help with establishment. This fungi is found naturally in the soil but takes time to reach new roots. Sprinkling some into the planting hole helps initial growth and future health. The powder must be in contact with the root for it to work.

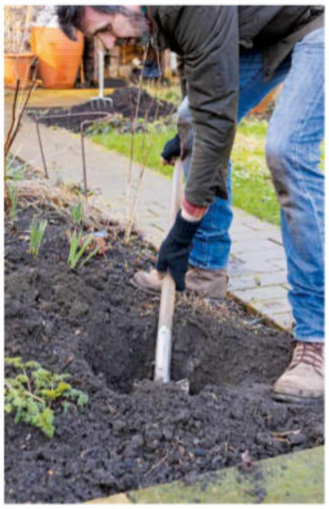
When planting, the graft union at the base should be just below ground level. Place a cane over the hole and position the plant to get the depth right.

New shoots will appear early in the spring, and flowers by mid-summer.

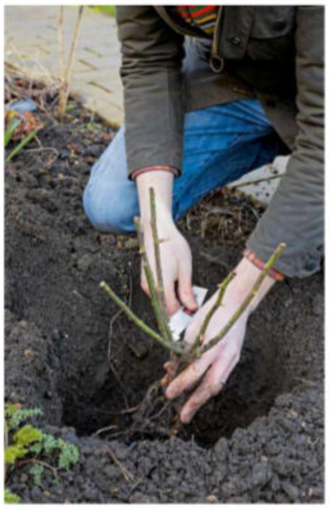
STEP BY STEP Plant bare-root roses



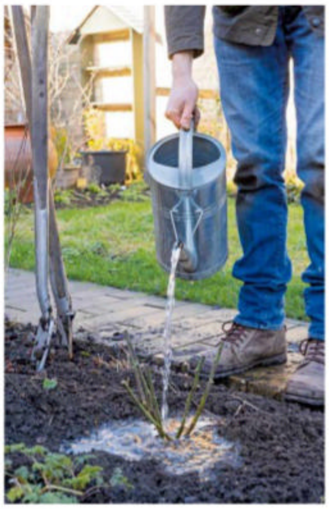
1 PRUNE back all the long roots by up to a third of their length. This makes them easier to handle when planting and encourages more lateral roots.



2 DIG out a wide hole. Break up the bottom with a fork and add a bucket of multi-purpose compost, and some powdered mycorrhizal fungi.



3 PLACE the rose with its roots spread out, and the graft union and stems just below the surface. Fill the hole, holding the rose in place as you firm it in.



4 SOAK in, making sure that water penetrates all around the root without disturbing the soil, and mulch with rotted manure. Water again in spring if it's dry.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH

Rotate pots of salad leaves

Make sure pots of salad leaves grow evenly by turning them round a little every few days. Plants grow towards light, so in a static pot they will soon become lopsided, with those at the back stretching out for more light. This is particularly noticeable with the soft growth of salad leaves.

When harvesting leaves in winter, only cut the outer leaves from each plant, as growth is slow and retaining the centre will help to keep the plants in production. If your plants are overcrowded, thin them out and use the ones you remove as your harvest.

Help salad plants grow well by keeping the pot in good light and turning it regularly

Wash and recycle pots

Fill a bucket with warm soapy water and wash some pots ready for spring sowing and planting. First, brush off any loose debris and cobwebs, then immerse the stack of pots in the warm water for a few minutes to loosen any old compost marks. Then clean it all off with a cloth or old scrubbing brush. Pay particular attention to the rim and ridges on the pots, where tiny snails and red spider mites could have taken refuge. Wash recycled food punnets too if you plan to use them in the greenhouse.

Get your pots ready for spring by cleaning them thoroughly

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

To keep your amaryllis blooming year on year, move it into a slightly larger pot after flowering. Let the compost dry out between waterings. After the last frost, put the pot outside for summer. Stop watering in August, then bring it indoors and start watering in mid-October.

Remove dust from succulents

Brush away any dust that has accumulated around spines and leaves of cacti and succulents. A small paint brush is perfect for gently dislodging dust or compost particles from nooks and crannies, or you can blow debris away from the leaf surface.

Move your plants somewhere comfortable to clean them, so you have plenty of space and can see what you're doing. While you work, also look out for mealybugs, which can resemble a pale clump of dust, and brush these away before they multiply.

Brush dust away so plants can make the most of winter sun

Don't forget

- ☐ Check stored dahlia tubers and discard any mouldy ones
- ☐ Open vents on very mild afternoons
- ☐ Keep an eye out for vine weevil damage and apply a biological control in heated greenhouses
- ☐ Sow summer bedding plants such as begonias, pinks and antirrhinums
- ☐ Keep the glazing clean to let in the maximum amount of light

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS
PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

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Plant garlic

Plant garlic in free-draining soil or, if your ground tends to stay wet in winter, plant in pots then transplant in spring. Position cloves 15-20cm apart, or one per pot, in a hole twice their depth, with the pointed end upwards. Firm in and water well.

Wait for leaves to appear before watering again. Garlic needs regular rain or watering in spring to ensure the bulbs swell, but water less often from June onwards, to avoid rotting.

Start garlic off in pots if your soil gets waterlogged over winter

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Use a soil-testing kit to check acidity levels across your veg plot, as it can vary. This will help you choose which crops to grow where. Potatoes like slightly acidic soil, while cabbages, pak choi and sprouts prefer alkaline soil.

Spread garden compost over the surface to protect the soil over winter and deter weed germination

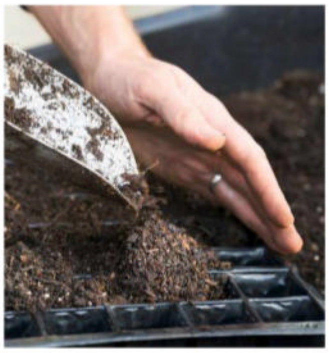
Top up raised beds

Now is a good time to spread a fresh layer of well-rotted garden compost or manure onto raised beds, as long as your soil isn't waterlogged or frozen.

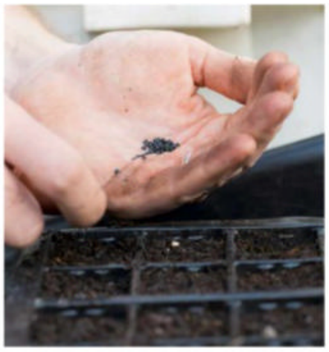
Remove any perennial weeds first, using a long-bladed tool to lever out those with deep roots, such as dandelions and docks. Then apply a 5cm layer of mulch evenly across the surface of the bed. But make sure it stays just below the top of the edging, so that soil won't spill out when you make new planting drills.

STEP BY STEP Sow onions

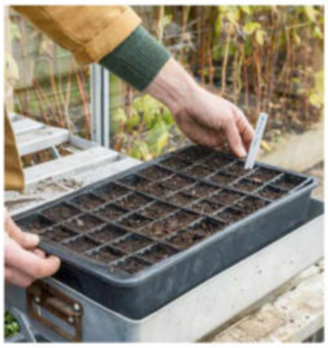
Growing onions from seed is straightforward and cheaper than growing from sets. And the earlier you sow, the bigger the onions should grow. The seeds germinate reliably at 16-18°C, so you'll need a heated propagator or a warm, sunny windowsill. Seedlings should appear in about a fortnight. Keep in a bright, airy place and water regularly. Once well rooted, harden them off and plant out in spring.



1 FILL a modular tray with peat-free multi-purpose compost. Tamp it down gently to give a level surface.



2 SOW two or three seeds per cell, then cover lightly with compost. Thin out later, if necessary, to just one strong seedling per cell.



3 STAND the modular tray in water to soak the compost thoroughly without dislodging the seeds, then cover with a clear lid.

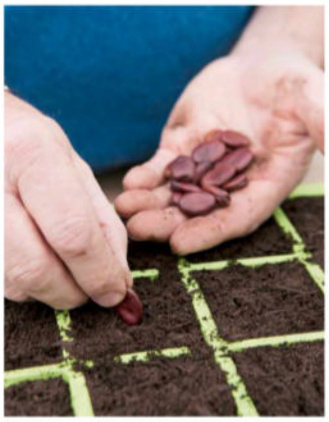
Don't forget

- ☐ Plant new fruit trees and bushes if your soil isn't excessively wet
- ☐ Continue harvesting kale, Brussels sprouts, parsnips, leeks and winter cabbages
- ☐ Force rhubarb by covering with a bucket or bin to exclude light
- ☐ Make a plan of what you want to sow this year and order seeds
- ☐ Remove cloches from winter crops on mild afternoons to improve the air flow

Sow broad beans in modules

Start off hardy broad beans in modular trays of peat-free multi-purpose compost, for an earlier crop. 'Aquadulce Claudia' is a good choice to use now. Sow one seed per module and insert them vertically if possible, scar end downwards, to avoid the flat face collecting moisture and potentially rotting.

Water well, then place in full sun on a greenhouse bench or in a coldframe to germinate. Cover with a clear lid to protect from mice, which can easily eat all the seeds overnight. Once germinated, keep in good light and water regularly. Plant out the seedlings once they're about 10cm tall.



Push broad bean seeds into the compost vertically, 5-7cm deep

Remove all the stems of autumn-fruiting raspberries right down at the base

Cut back autumn raspberries

Prune autumn-fruiting raspberries now that they're fully dormant. These late-fruiting canes are the easiest to prune as there is no need to select canes to keep. Just prune them all down to ground level using long-handled loppers or secateurs.

Weed around the base once you've cleared the debris away and if there are canes emerging away from the clump or row, dig them out with a spade to keep them from spreading into other fruit bushes. Finish by mulching the soil with well-rotted manure.

Re-wrap stored apples in fresh paper after examining them closely

Check your stored apples

Do a weekly check of stored apples, removing any that show signs of deterioration or rot. Look for brown patches or specks on the surface, and feel for any soft areas under the skin. Use fresh paper to re-wrap the perfect fruit that you return to the tray, as the old paper may carry fungal spores.

If you find more spoiled fruits than expected, move them to a cooler place to slow deterioration and use up the remaining apples as soon as you can.

Next month

- ☐ Protect vulnerable plants on very cold nights
- ☐ Cut down deciduous grasses
- ☐ Cut back overgrown ivy
- ☐ Finish pruning apple trees
- ☐ Make fat-ball feeders for birds

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS
PHOTOS: MARSHA ARNOLD; SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

YOUR PRUNING MONTH

Late winter is the perfect time of year to renovate overgrown trees and shrubs, says **Frances Tophill**

January is often not the most inspiring month in the garden in terms of the visuals but there are some species that will be performing for you if you've planned for it. Coloured-stemmed dogwoods, *Prunus serrula*, *Acer griseum* and *Rubus cockburnianus* will be looking great. Also, some of the earlier hellebores might be starting to flower in warmer regions. In general, though, most of the greenery has died back, berries will be largely done, and sometimes the garden can look a little brown and a little tangled.

A lot of wildlife will be either hiding or hibernating at this time of year, especially in the leaf litter, so wait until things have warmed up a fair bit before doing any major tidying up.

One job that's great to get stuck into in January is the renovation of tangled or overgrown specimens. While plants are still fully dormant and free from leaves, you can really see their shapes clearly. For those plants that need to be dormant when pruned, now is the last chance to do it.

Remove dead wood to prevent decay spreading up the stem

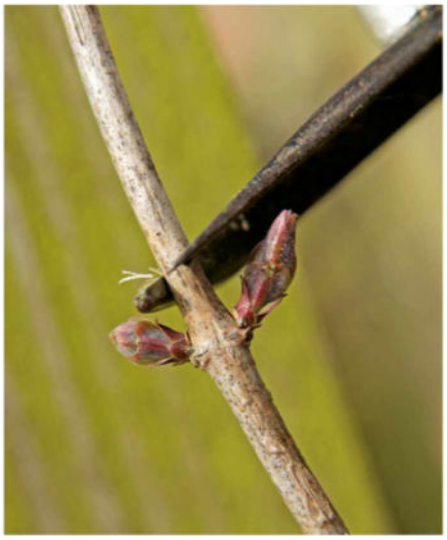
PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM; TIM SANDALL

Cotinus can become very large over time, but healthy plants will bounce back from a hard prune

Plants to prune now

Now is the best time to prune most deciduous species of shrub and tree because their food reserves are stored safely in their roots. Growth should return in two or three months.

WILLOW Cut these back as hard as you like now, unless you want to keep the stems a little longer for their decorative value.



HONEYSUCKLE This is a good time for renovation pruning of deciduous climbing species to tidy an unruly tangle.

BLACKCURRANTS Cut thin, whippy growth and the oldest wood. Leave new and vigorous stems in an open framework.

PEAR Prune these now to get the shapes you want them to grow in, whether it's a goblet, espalier or lollipop.

Don't prune these now

Let *Rubus cockburnianus* brighten up the winter garden for now, and prune in March

✗ **COLOURED STEMS** Leave these for a while yet because they are looking their best right now. Remember there is still plenty of time and no rush. I would instead start the big clear up in early March.

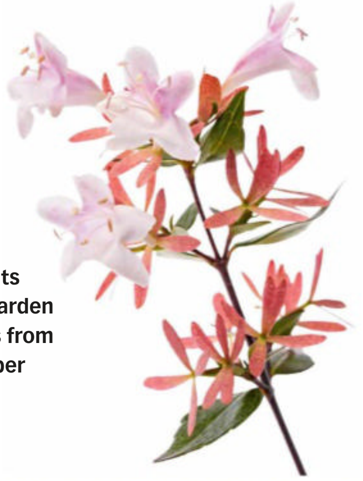
✗ **BIRCH** Some deciduous trees break the January-pruning rule and will bleed sap if worked on between now and spring. Birch is one, as are maples and *Tilia* (lime).

✗ **FENNEL** This plant's hollow stems provide shelter for many invertebrates. If you do need to cut any hollow-stemmed herbaceous plants this month, leave at least 15cm above the soil to reduce the impact on wildlife.

Renovation pruning

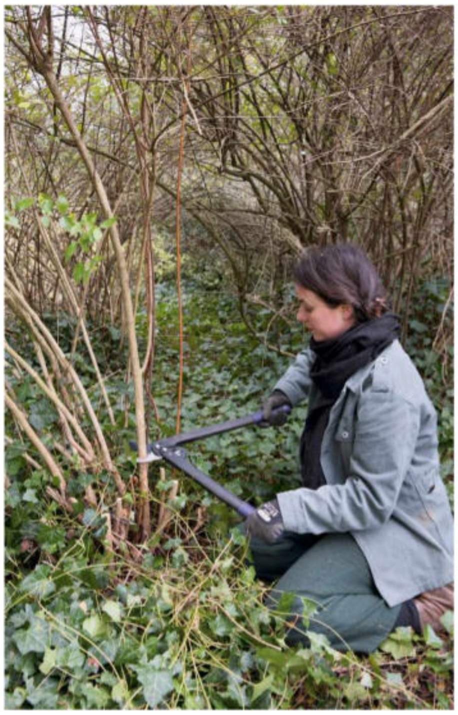
Abelia is a genus of summer- and late-summer flowering shrubs. They are fairly tidy plants, but every few years can require a hard prune to rejuvenate them, bring them back to the size you'd like and generally keep them neat.

This method works well on tough, hardy shrubs that have become completely overgrown within their space. They will respond well, growing back strongly once warmer and longer days arrive in a month or two.

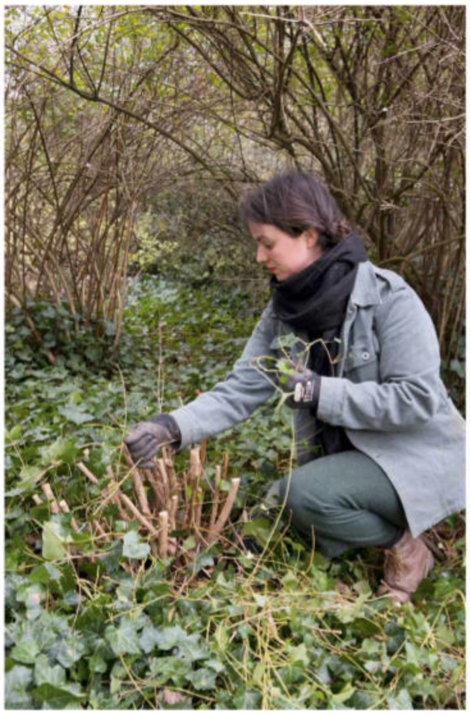


Abelia pays its way in the garden with flowers from July to October

Step by step



1 CUT the whole plant back to about 20cm. This allows you to look at the form and health of the plant. Then remove the weakest stems, leaving the strongest, healthiest ones.



2 WEED around the base of the plant to remove any competition. At this time of year weeds may be below ground, so investigate the soil for things like nettle and ground elder.

3 ADD your prunings to the compost heap, first cutting them up into short sections, or putting them through a chipper so they will break down much more quickly.

Top tip

Once plants have been pruned like this, it can be a shock to their system, so it's a good idea to keep an eye on them and make sure they recover. So once spring starts, giving them a feed can be helpful for healthy regrowth. You could also mulch them to increase their ability to hold on to water and assimilate nutrients through the soil. The image to the right shows the same shrub as that pruned above nine months later, having made a good recovery from a hard prune.

Healthy, vigorous shrubs regrow quickly

Also prune this way

- **PHILADELPHUS** Will respond well to renovation pruning in winter.
- **COTINUS** Also grows back well if healthy, like the shrub on p108.
- **HYDRANGEA 'ANNABELLE'** Old blooms can be cut right back in late winter or spring, allowing new stems to grow from the ground.
- **LEYCESTERIA FORMOSA** This will leave nasty spikes and then grow in a messy form if cut to a point above the ground. Instead cut the long stems right back, in spring.

Abelia

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Flowers							■	■	■	■		
Renovate	■	■										■

NEXT MONTH Frances shows you how to get holly into shape

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PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/SCISETTIALFIO

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- **11.45am** Groups swap
- **12.45pm** Champagne and canapés
- **1.15pm** Call for lunch. You will be seated with other guests
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Celebrate spring in style at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons

Thursday 24 April 2025, £295pp

To welcome the spring season, *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine* is delighted to offer an exclusive event at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, a Belmond Hotel.

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During your day, explore the 11 gardens with a member of Le Manoir's senior garden team and get your hands dirty with a seed-sowing masterclass.

After the activities, you'll enjoy a champagne reception followed by a three-course Michelin-star lunch featuring an exquisite menu that reflects the season, with accompanying wines.

Places are limited, so secure your ticket now for what will be an unforgettable day.

"I can't thank you enough for putting on this fabulous event at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons. We had a wonderful day and I believe we shall be talking about this day for years to come. Thank you" Sue, *GW* reader

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Your questions answered

Q&A

Edited by Emma Crawforth

This month

114 *Gardeners' Question Time*

The BBC Radio 4 experts answer this month's pick of readers' queries, including:

- Plants for privacy from neighbours
- How to sort an overgrown hydrangea
- A lime tree that doesn't bear fruit

Carrot fly

This is a common insect, which I've had encounters with on my own veg plot. Carrot flies (*Psila rosae*) lay their eggs on the soil next to carrots and related plants. After a week, maggots hatch and start to feed on the roots. The result of a severe infestation is dark tunnels in your veg, sometimes so extensive that the root isn't worth eating at all.

By knowing the biology of these flies, you can prevent them attacking your carrots. It's essential to sow into 'clean' soil or compost. Pupae and larvae of the fly overwinter in soil and in any carrot remains left there. Adults (flies) emerge in late May or June to lay more eggs near carrots. Using a fine mesh barrier (with no gaps) will prevent flies reaching a crop, but only if there are no pupae in the soil beneath the mesh already. Sow thinly (see my Top Tip, right) and harvest promptly, then store the carrots after inspecting them. Varieties with some resistance to the flies include 'Flyaway', 'Maestro' and 'Resistafly'. Some gardeners avoid sowing carrots until June so the first of two generations of maggots to hatch has nothing to feed on.

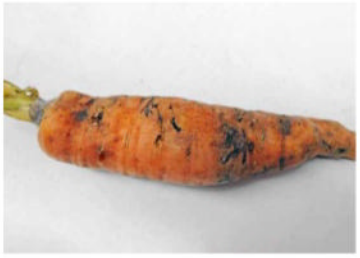
Emma

Emma Crawforth, Horticultural Editor

Q What are the black rings on my stored carrots?

Alie Hagedoorn, Oxfordshire

A EMMA SAYS Maggots of the carrot fly have eaten their way into your carrots, making tunnels to crawl into as they nibbled. They have then continued to eat into the carrots during storage.



For extra problem-solving expertise on all sorts of gardening topics, head to our subscriber-only Q&A section at **GardenersWorld.com/premium**

TOP TIP

Sow carrot seeds widely spaced to avoid thinning out the seedlings, as touching them releases scent that attracts egg-laying carrot flies to the crop.

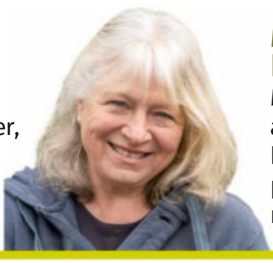
PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

Gardeners' Question Time

Our experts tackle your queries, including fruit trees that won't fruit, an overgrown hydrangea and what to plant under an acer

Bob Flowerdew
Bob is the author of dozens of gardening books, as well as a radio presenter and organic gardener.

Anne Swithinbank
A keen fruit, vegetable and house-plant grower, Anne was formerly the glasshouse supervisor at RHS Garden Wisley.



Matt Biggs
Matt trained at Kew and has been gardening professionally for more than 30 years.

Q Plants for privacy from overlooking neighbours?

Heather Johnson, by email

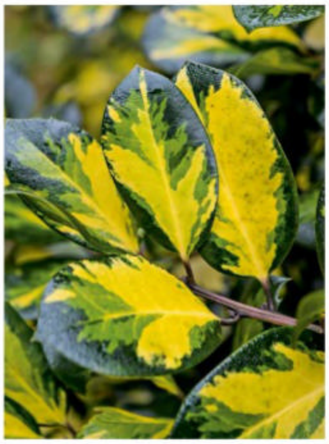
A MATT SAYS You could create a higher barrier just forward of the boundary, using pleached trees. Hornbeam is ideal, with fresh green leaves in spring, golden autumn colour and fine branches in winter. Look out for the variety Rockhampton Red, which takes on red and orange hues in the autumn.

Alternatively, try *Arbutus unedo*, also known as the strawberry tree, which boasts cinnamon-coloured, peeling stems, dark evergreen leaves, bell-like white flowers and orange-pink fruit.

Views can also be blocked by planting nearer to the house, staggering planting back towards the boundary to screen the line of vision. Do this using large shrubs such as evergreen *Hoheria* 'Borde Hill' or deciduous *Sorbus* 'Chinese Lace'. Check the final height and spread of trees before buying to make sure they are appropriate.

Q&A
TEAM ANSWER
Planting for privacy

Pleaching is a great way to block a view without losing space



'Lawsoniana' holly provides privacy and interest all year

A ANNE SAYS Consider ploys such as extending a fence upwards with trellis. Then, why not introduce some edible plants for flowers and fruits? A couple of compatible apples (for good pollination) on dwarfing M9 rootstocks will give you trees roughly 2.5m in height. Another option would be the self-fertile damson 'Merryweather Damson', which will make a tree about 4.5m tall on a semi-vigorous rootstock.

If you want an evergreen, the holly *Ilex* x *altaclerensis* 'Lawsoniana' has bright variegated leaves with few spines and, as long as there is a male holly nearby, red berries. For winter scent, *Viburnum* x *bodnantense* 'Dawn' is deciduous but makes a good thicket of branches. All of these will attract lots of birds to your new garden.

Q Can I grow ginger between asparagus beds?

Deborah Tutton, south-west France

A BOB SAYS I'm guessing you mean culinary ginger. Sadly, this isn't hardy, even in the milder climate of south-west France. Ornamental ginger lilies, hedychiums, would probably survive if their roots are given extra cover on freezing nights.

Asparagus is very competitive, though, with a wide-ranging root system, so it may be hard to establish any plants between your two beds.

Instead, I'd suggest seakale, *Crambe maritima*, which loves these conditions. This resembles loose-leaf cabbage, with large heads of white flowers.

The first shoots each year of seakale can be blanched – a forgotten gourmet treat. It takes three years to build up the crown, just as with asparagus.

***Crambe maritima* tolerates poorer, well-drained soils**

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM; TIM SANDALL

Hazels grow fast and can be cut back hard to control size

Q Could you suggest plants for my aviary? They must be safe for finches

Martin Clements, Worcestershire

A ANNE SAYS Starting with general advice, avoid pesticide residues on new plants by sourcing from organic growers. The roots of such plants should also be free of granules and pellets of inorganic fertilisers.

For woody perching twigs, include beech, small-leaved lime, hazel and wild cherry. All of these respond well to cutting back but would obviously be too large if allowed to mature.

As an understorey, you could try adding fruit bushes such as redcurrants, but there may be a danger of the finches eating too many fruits at once.

They'll enjoy a ground cover of herbs like lemon balm and seed-bearing weeds such as sow thistle and dandelion. Certainly, the wild finches of our garden love the seeds of evening primrose and lavender.

An overgrown hydrangea will respond well to hard pruning

Q What can I grow under my very large acer?

Oesjay, Dumfries and Galloway

A MATT SAYS To go with the Japanese look of the acer, try clump-forming *Liriope muscari* 'Big Blue', producing upright spikes of blue-purple flowers above arching, pale-green leathery leaves in autumn, followed by black berries.

Lower-growing with strappy black leaves is *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Kokuryū', and *Hakonechloa* 'Aureola' displays yellow-tinted, ribbon-like leaves which gradually form spreading mounds. *Leptinella squalida* 'Platt's Black' is a ground-hugging evergreen plant with fern-like leaves which are dark bronze with green tips. Finally, also consider *Pachysandra terminalis*, a low-growing, evergreen groundcover with small spikes of white flowers in the summer.

Hakonechloa 'Aureola' is at its most dramatic in large drifts

Q A root's rooting out into the soil from our plum's pot. Help!

Gareth and Maria, by email

A BOB SAYS On the down-side, if left to carry on rooting out into the soil, your tree will go on to become much larger than you may want. But at the same time, rooting out into the soil is allowing it to access lots of food and water, thus ensuring better harvests. Watering must be exemplary with container-grown fruit trees, or the fruit will crack or drop off, but a root 'life-line' makes this much less likely.

However, it is unlikely that your tree will be as well moored in the soil as a traditionally-planted one, so it may become a bit unstable. This means it will probably need staking or guying. And one other problem is that you will not be able to move the container in the future.

Plum trees in soil will always outperform those in pots

Thus it's probably wisest to cut this root off. Do so now in winter to lessen the shock to the tree. Then be more generous, with much more watering and feeding.

Q How best to renovate dogwood and hydrangea?

Alex, by email

A MATT SAYS Overgrown mophead hydrangeas can be pruned back to the base in late spring. You will lose flowers but the new stems will flower next year. Feed with general fertiliser after pruning, mulch with a layer of well-rotted organic matter and make sure it is well watered before the onset of dry periods.

Growth can be controlled by removing up to two-thirds of the older wood at the base toward the end of each winter.

Coloured dogwoods can be cut back close to the base each year in early spring. Feed with a general fertiliser, mulch and keep the plant well watered to help regrowth. Less vigorous cultivars such as *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' should only have a third of the old stems removed, or be pruned every two years.

Q What should I do now with last year's rather sorry-looking amaryllis?

Samantha Chapman, Hampshire

A ANNE SAYS Amaryllis need good light, and after flowering (usually during winter) are best placed on a windowsill in normal room temperatures for sturdy leaf development.

They need watering when the compost surface begins to dry. When healthy growth is under way, they need an occasional general-purpose liquid feed.

Bulbs can sometimes flower when the leaves are still green, but they are usually rested by withholding water in August or September.

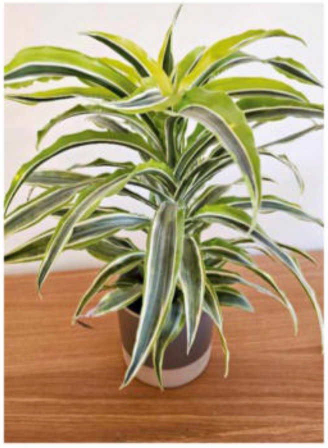
After the leaves have died back, bulbs are started off again in a pot of fresh compost. Try resting yours now by drying it off. In spring, remove any offsets, repot and place in good light.

Amaryllis can be grown on for next year, but will need care

Q What is this? And can I take cuttings?

Natalie Hughes, West Sussex

A ANNE SAYS This looks to be a cultivar of *Dracaena fragrans* (Deremensis Group), possibly Surprise. As it grows taller, remove the shoot tip as a 15cm-long cutting and the plant will branch out as a result. One day, it could reach 1.8m tall; I had a White Stripe dracaena that touched the ceiling.

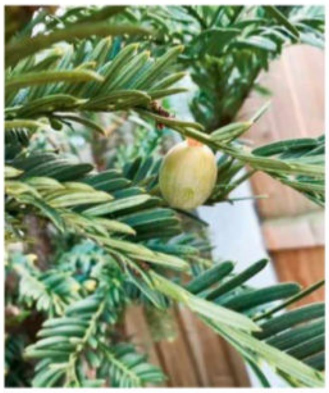


Many dracaenas can grow very large in favourable locations

Q Is this a yew tree, or something else?

Ann Watkins, by email

A MATT SAYS This is probably *Cephalotaxus harringtonia*, the Japanese Plum Yew. It becomes a spreading shrub or small tree and the green fruits ripen to brown in autumn on female plants. Sow the seed once it's ripe in moist compost and allow to chill over winter.



Japanese Plum Tree fruits are edible, unlike those of yew

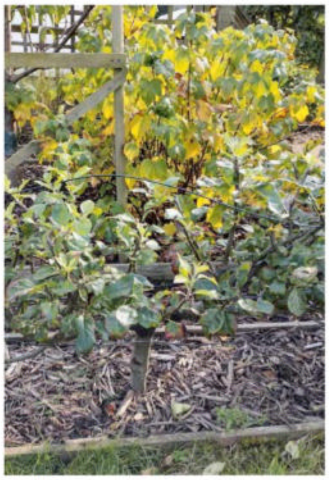
Sieve garden compost to remove any lumps if adding to mixes

Q Is peat-free compost lower in nutrients?

Polly Bean, Somerset

A BOB SAYS I mix in a huge amount of sieved garden compost! Sadly, too many of the most widely available peat-free composts do poorly in my trials compared to garden compost.

The major drawback of garden compost is that it contains weed seeds, so top your pots with a layer of unmixed peat-free compost to discourage them.



Pruning is a little trickier than usual with step-over apples

Q No flowers on my step-over apple tree. Why?

Jeff Simpson, Staffordshire

A BOB SAYS I've not been impressed by step-overs. Being this close to the ground has little benefit for the apples, and plants often just get in the way. If it was mine I'd replace it with cordon plants.

However, it's growing strongly and appears to be healthy. It just might be too young. Or maybe it's producing some flowerbuds but these are positioned on the tips, so are being removed with your pruning – but of course if you just stop pruning it will quickly become congested.

I suggest you prune each side in alternate years. If still no flowers appear, give it a couple of heavy dressings of wood ashes in spring and early summer.

Q&A HOT TOPIC
Apple tree care

Q Can I prune off apple watershoots now?

Mrs G Eley, by email

A MATT SAYS Overgrown trees should be pruned gradually over three years; hard pruning leads to vigorous water shoots. Reform the crown, removing any branches that are badly placed, are growing inwards or are weak.

This opens up the tree's canopy, improves air circulation and creates the desired goblet shape for ease of pruning and harvest. The remaining water shoots can be cut back by 10cm to an outward-facing bud. You may need to remove more branches over the following years to maintain the goblet shape. Once plump, rounded flowerbuds start to form, return to standard winter pruning.

January is the perfect time to renovate an overgrown apple tree

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS

Prolonged wet periods can set citrus trees back in summer

Q Why doesn't my lime tree bear fruit?

Gillian Frazer, Stirlingshire

A ANNE SAYS Limes make a show of fragrant blossom in spring but even the healthiest plant cannot support as many limes as there are flowers. There is usually a big initial drop, and then a few more will go until the small tree is left with perhaps a dozen fruits to reach maturity. These take their time to grow and may not ripen until winter.

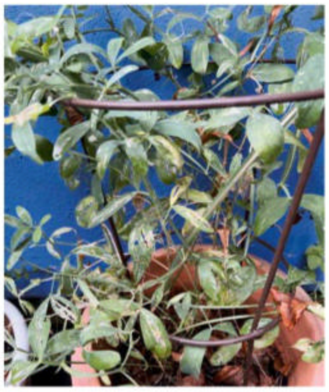
Any hiccup in the health of a plant, such as a bad attack of scale insects, lack of nutrients, a need for repotting or low temperatures, could cause the tree to drop all its fruits.

This winter my plant had only one lime, probably because it stood outdoors during such a rainy summer. Some of the roots could have rotted, and all that rain probably washed nutrients out of the compost. If next summer is as wet, try keeping any potted limes or lemons under cover to avoid them being affected.

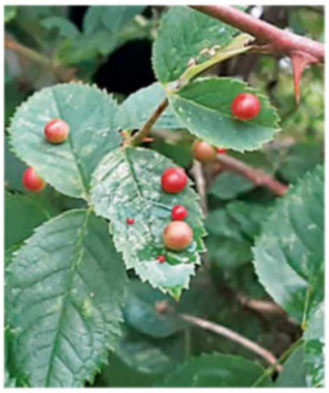
Q What's up with my *Lathyrus*?

Thespina, by email

A MATT SAYS It looks like slug damage as they were particularly problematic last year. This plant would be so much happier in the ground where it could grow to its full extent. Alternatively use a much larger pot filled with multi-purpose compost with added John Innes compost, and keep the plant well fed and watered.



Everlasting sweet peas need lots of compost in their pot



Each gall is home to a larva, readying to hatch in spring

Q What on earth are these? Seeds?

Lotta Kirchwehn, Argyll

A ANNE SAYS These strange things are smooth rose pea galls, caused by a tiny wasp.

The rose produces the gall in response to the wasp laying its eggs. Each one contains a larva, feeding on the interior. The galls fall with the leaves in autumn, and larvae then hatch into adults in the spring.

Q Are there any white-rot resistant onion varieties?

David Butler, by email

A BOB SAYS White rot can spoil and kill most alliums. It's an increasingly common problem on veg plots and once present in the soil it is very difficult to eradicate, lasting in a dormant state for a couple of decades. Unfortunately there are no effective treatments available to domestic gardeners.

Although it's too late for you, do warn friends not to plant any suspicious sets or transplants, especially any that are showing tiny black sclerotia.

A crop can be raised by starting in clean compost in modules, potting up into larger pots and later planting out, then harvesting as soon as possible once the bulbs are ready.

It's worth patrolling daily, removing every suspect plant before the infection spreads; do not compost, but burn these instead. Some recommend Golden Bear F1, which I've not tried. I grow and recommend Santero F1, which has shown considerable resistance, though less so toward the end of the season – so harvest early.

Avoid onion white rot by buying only from reputable sources

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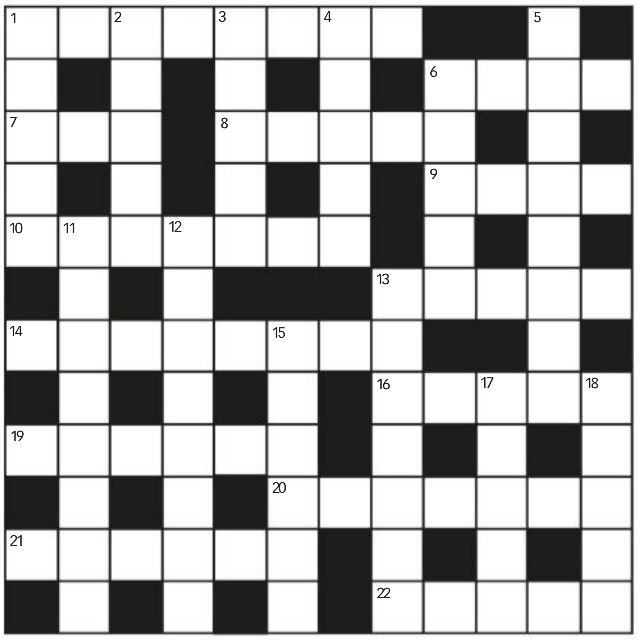
Crossword

Put down your trowel, pick up a pen and exercise those brain muscles instead...



CROSSWORD COMPLIED BY NICOLA TREVETT

ACROSS

1 High-energy food for birds during the winter months (3,5)

6 Check hellebore foliage for signs of leaf __ disease (4)

7 Clean and sharpen metal tools and spray with __ (3)

8 Common name for *Ulex* (5)

9 *Rudbeckia hirta* is also known as black __ Susan (4)

10 Prickly native wildflowers whose seeds are loved by birds (7)

13 *Stokesia laevis* is the botanical name for Stokes' __ (5)

14 Perennial leafy herb with a subtle liquorice flavour (8)

16 __ fir is the common name for *Abies procera* (5)

19 A group of plants that share a uniform character (6)

20 __ bonnet is a traditional name for *Aquilegia vulgaris* (7)

21 __ *dioica* is the formal name for red campion (6)

22 Use this to sift soil, compost and leafmould (5)

DOWN

1 Protect vulnerable outdoor plants such as Mexican salvias from __ (5)

2 Genus of deciduous trees often with colourful winter twigs (5)

3 Keep steps and paths clear of this slippery hazard (5)

4 __-and-ladies is one of many names for *Arum maculatum* (5)

5 Slow-release organic fertiliser high in phosphorus (8)

6 Black sunflower __ are a nutritious winter treat for birds (5)

11 __ *hyemalis* provides cheery yellow flowers in late winter (8)

12 Useful machine for distributing fertiliser and seeds (8)

13 Sort through seeds of hardy __ to sow in modular trays for early flowers (7)

15 Pungent aromatic rhizome widely used as a spice (6)

17 'Louise __ of Jersey' is a juicy pear whose skin has a red flush (5)

18 *Sidalcea* '__ Heugh' has large, mauve-pink blooms with fringed petals (5)

SOLUTIONS to this crossword can be found in *Have your say* on p18

Gardeners' World magazine

Issue number 407

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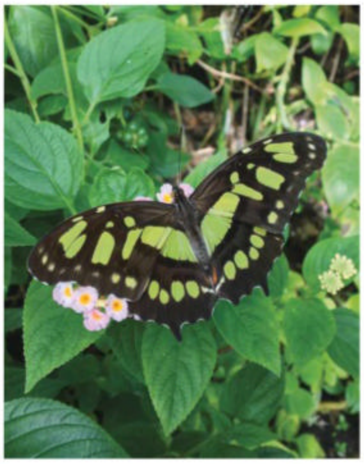

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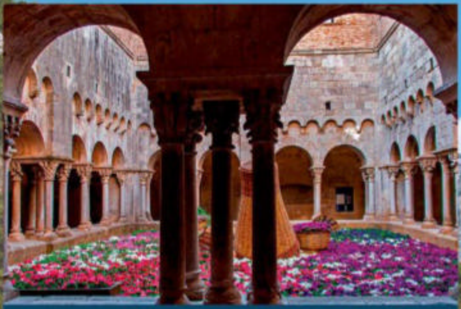

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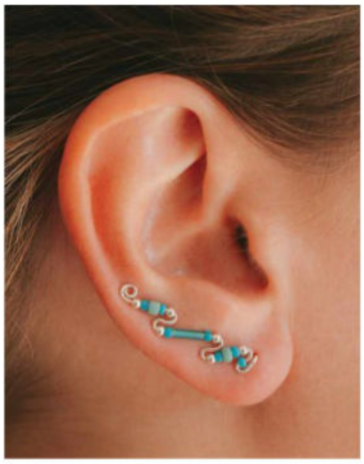

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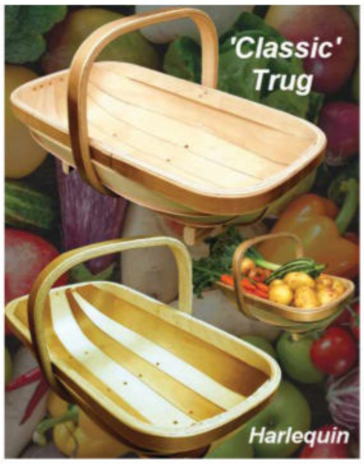

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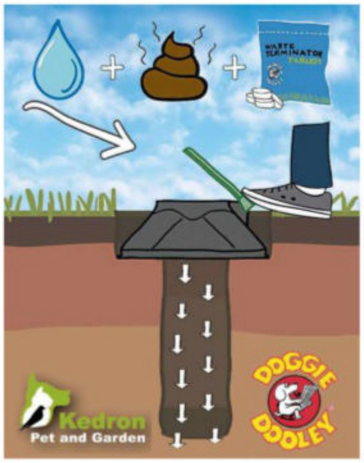

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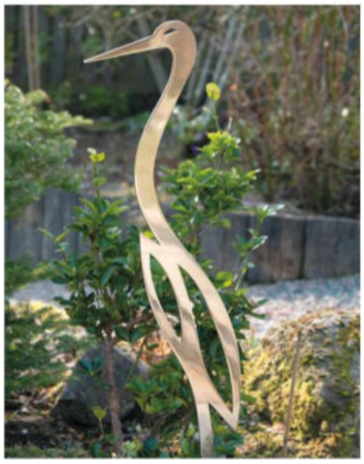

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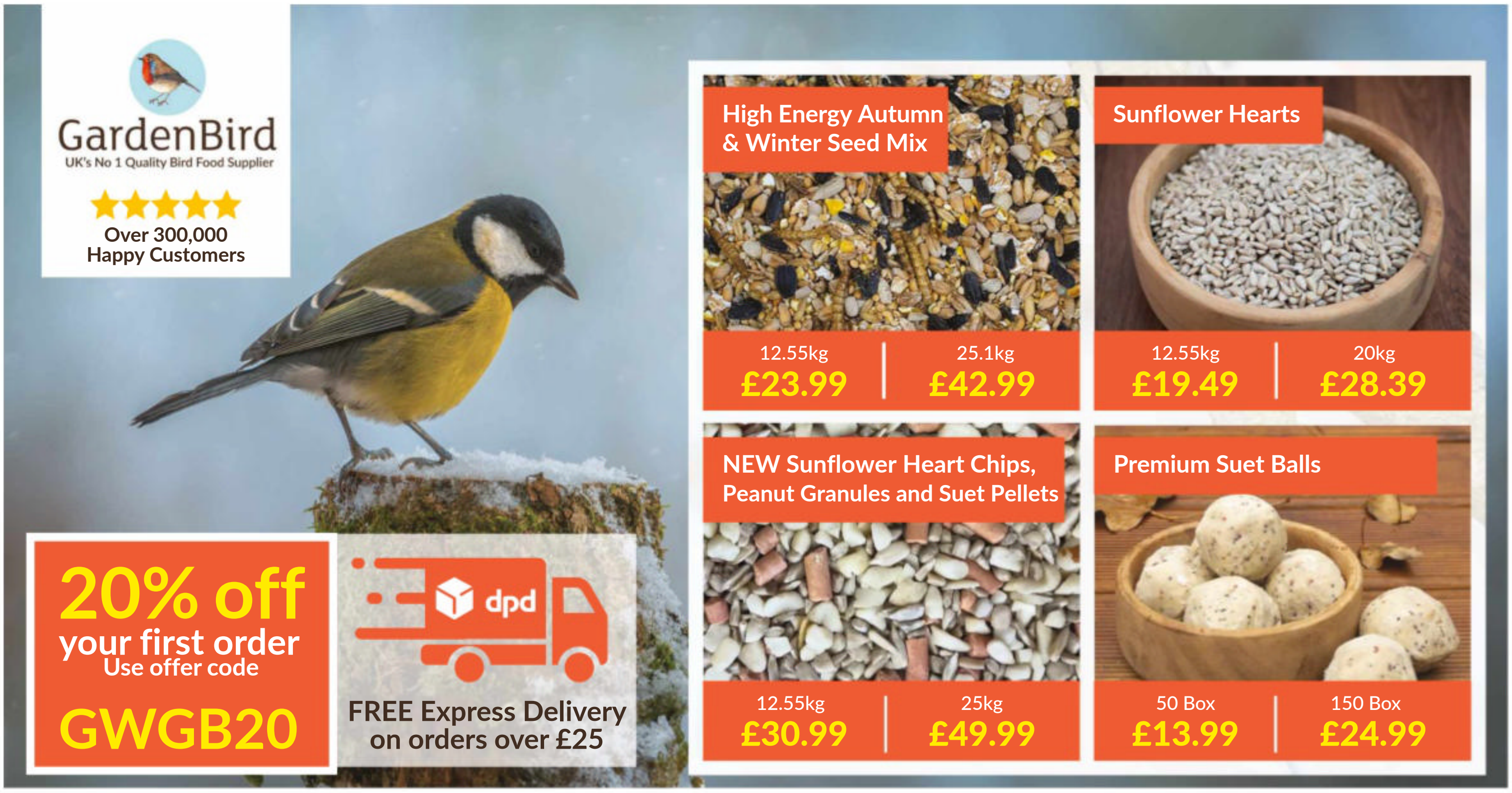

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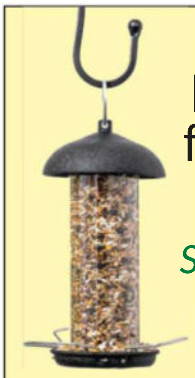

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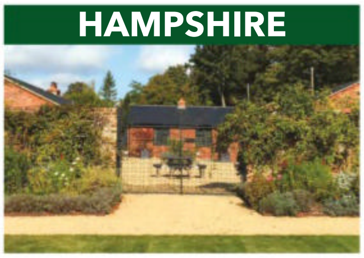

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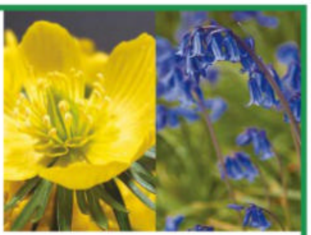

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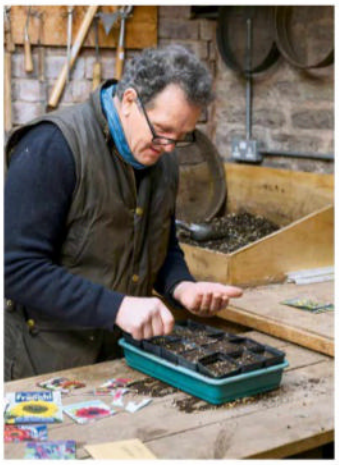

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Tales from Titchmarsh

Tending the land is a rewarding if undervalued career, and it's also the best way to safeguard our future on this planet, says **Alan**

'Same old, same old…' is a phrase that sends a shiver down my spine. Friends who have hoed the same furrow (pardon the gardening analogy) year after year in a job that pays the rent but which they do not like have my deepest sympathy.

Every New Year reminds me of my good luck in pursuing a career that has never been anything less than an all-consuming passion. Oh, I have days off and other interests, but deep at the heart of my very being is a burning desire to make a difference to the earth – to contribute to its health and wellbeing and to beautify my surroundings.

Should this sound excessively saintly, I will admit to a degree of self-interest: I find my life enriched by gazing on a well-grown and well-designed garden. I relish the fact that wildlife keeps me company and that every year, thanks to the seasons in our cool, temperate climate, I am given the chance to start again. Saintly I am not, but I am most certainly driven by a desire to make a positive difference to my patch of land.

> “The belief still stands that 'those who can should do other jobs; those who can't can always go into gardening'”

You may well feel the same, but the chances are that for you gardening is your hobby; for me it is at the heart of my profession, even though I have also diversified into writing and broadcasting about it. Sadly, few school leavers are encouraged to take the path that leads into the garden. The belief still stands that 'those who can should do other jobs; those who can't can always go into gardening'.

Yes, gardening is so diverse that it can cope with all manner of skills and aptitudes. There are jobs in horticulture for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and this should be seen as a strength, not a weakness. And there is also the need for those who are driven to do something for the world around them, rather than just acknowledge an awareness of global warming and climate change. This mantra is breeding a younger population frightened of what the future might hold, but who are seldom encouraged to enter a profession at the sharp end of environmental care: actually tending to the earth and ensuring that their patch of it has a bright and sustainable future.

We need environmental scientists and climatologists, but we also need gardeners and farmers who want to be stewards of the land and ensure that it is tended in such a way that it remains healthy and productive into the future.

Alas, today we pay farmers to fill fields of good earth with solar panels to save energy, failing to see that the energy saved is likely being used to ship cheap foreign food across the oceans to our shores.

In the 1950s a third of the average household income was spent on food. Today that proportion is close to a 10th. Our farmers, growers and commercial gardeners are expected to get by on an " This Magazine Free On SoftArchive .is" ever-diminishing budget, driven by consumers who will buy their food from whichever supermarket offers them the best bargain. Unless we support our local growers and pay a fair price for food, the ultimate play-out of this situation is that within a frighteningly short space of time the UK will not grow any of its own food – every single comestible item will be imported.

The way to fight against this is to show our children and grandchildren just what a patch of land can do to sustain us physically and spiritually. You know how good you feel when you are out there, when you are cultivating things, when you have made them look beautiful. Pass on that enthusiasm and encourage young people to consider it as a career. Only then will they truly understand the vital importance of the landscape in feeding us and . contributing to our mental health

The tycoon Elon Musk has an ambition to one day land on a distant planet. Good luck to him in those gaunt and treeless landscapes. If he diverted his energies into sustaining the woodlands and the mountains, the rivers and the meadows around him, he would make a far greater contribution to the future of mankind here on earth. He could do worse than start off by making a .garden

Alan

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